



Psalm 73

A psalm of Asaph

1 Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart. 2 But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. 3 For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

4 They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong. 5 They are free from the burdens common to man; they are not plagued by human ills. 6 Therefore pride is their necklace; they clothe themselves with violence. 7 From their callous hearts comes iniquity; the evil conceits of their minds know no limits. 8 They scoff, and speak with malice; in their arrogance they threaten oppression. 9 Their mouths lay claim to heaven, and their tongues take possession of the earth. 10 Therefore their people turn to them and drink up waters in abundance. 11 They say, "How can God know? Does the Most High have knowledge?"

12 This is what the wicked are like—always carefree, they increase in wealth. 13 Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure; in vain have I washed my hands in innocence. 14 All day long I have been plagued; I have been punished every morning.

15 If I had said, "I will speak thus," I would have betrayed your children. 16 When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me 17 till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny.

18 Surely you place them on slippery ground; you cast them down to ruin. 19 How suddenly are they destroyed, completely swept away by terrors! 20 As a dream when one awakes, so when you arise, O LORD, you will despise them as fantasies.

21 When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered, 22 I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you.

23 Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. 24 You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory. 25 Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. 26 My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

27 Those who are far from you will perish; you destroy all who are unfaithful to you. 28 But as for me, it is good to be near God. I have made the Sovereign LORD my refuge; I will tell of all your deeds.

A spiritual conundrum

▲ *Why are sinners so prosperous?*

- 3 I saw the prosperity of the wicked.
- 4 They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong.
- 5 They are free from the burdens common to man; they are not plagued by human ills.

▲ *Why are sinners permitted to be so proud and presumptuous?*

- 6 Therefore pride is their necklace; they clothe themselves with violence.
- 7 From their callous hearts comes iniquity; the evil conceits of their minds know no limits.
- 8 They scoff, and speak with malice; in their arrogance they threaten oppression.
- 9 Their mouths lay claim to heaven, and their tongues take possession of the earth.
- 10 Therefore their people turn to them and drink up waters in abundance.
- 11 They say, "How can God know? Does the Most High have knowledge?"
- 12 That is what the wicked are like—always carefree, they increase in wealth.

▲ *Why are the saints "punished" for their purity?*

- 13 Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure; in vain have I washed my hands in innocence.
- 14 All day long I have been plagued; I have been punished every morning.

A spiritual crisis

▲ *I was envious!*

- 1 Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart.
- 2 But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold.
- 3 For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

▲ *I was embittered!*

- 21 When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered,
- 22 I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you.

▲ *I was embracing error!*

- 13 Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure; in vain have I washed my hands in innocence.
- 14 All day long I have been plagued; I have been punished every morning.
- 15 If I had said, "I will speak thus," I would have betrayed your children.

▲ *I was endangered!*

- 2 But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold.

▲ *I was emotionally exhausted!*

- 16 When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me
- 17 till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny.

A spiritual clarification

▲ *Ruin will come to the foolish sinner!*

- 18 Surely you place them on slippery ground; you cast them down to ruin.
- 19 How suddenly are they destroyed, completely swept away by terrors!
- 20 As a dream when one awakes, so when you arise, O LORD, you will despise them as fantasies.

▲ *That is a perilous and slippery slope, sinner!*

▲ *There is a period of patience, sinner!*

▲ *There is a payday someday!*

▲ *Rescue will come for the faithful saint!*

- 23 Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand.
- 24 You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory.
- 25 Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you.
- 26 My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

▲ *There is God's grip here!*

▲ *There is God's guidance here!*

▲ *There is God's grace here!*

▲ *There is God's glory hereafter!*

A settled conclusion

▲ *I choose to be close to God!*

- 27 Those who are far from you will perish; you destroy all who are unfaithful to you.
- 28 But as for me, it is good to be near God.

▲ *I choose to be confident in God!*

- 28 I have made the Sovereign LORD my refuge; I will tell of all your deeds.

Asaph the Psalmist

1. Asaph was one of the Levites put in charge of music at the house of the LORD by King David after he had the Ark brought to Jerusalem (ca. 992 B.C.).

1 CHRONICLES 6:31-47

These are the men David put in charge of the music in the house of the Lord after the ark came to rest there. They ministered with music before the tabernacle, the Tent of Meeting, until Solomon built the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem. They performed their duties according to the regulations laid down for them. Here are the men who served, together with all their sons: From the Kohathites: Heman, the musician...and Heman's associate Asaph, who served at his right hand...

(See also 1 CHRONICLES 15:16-22 and 1 CHRONICLES 16:1-37)

2. Asaph and his sons were appointed to the ministry of prophesying with musical instruments.

1 CHRONICLES 25:1-31

David, together with the commanders of the army, set apart some of the sons of Asaph, Heman and Jeduthun for the ministry of prophesying, accompanied by harps, lyres and cymbals. Here is the list of the men who performed this service: From the sons of Asaph: Zaccur, Joseph, Nethaniah and Asarelah. The sons of Asaph were under the supervision of Asaph, who prophesied under the king's supervision...

3. Asaph continued in ministry after David's death and ministered at the dedication of the Temple under the direction of King Solomon. Asaph was ministering when the cloud of glory filled the Temple (ca. mid-900's B.C.).

2 CHRONICLES 5:11-14

The priests then withdrew from the Holy Place. All the priests who were there had consecrated themselves, regardless of their divisions. All the Levites who were musicians—Asaph, Heman, Jeduthun and their sons and relatives—stood on the east side of the altar, dressed in fine linen and playing cymbals, harps and lyres. They were accompanied by 120 priests sounding trumpets. The trumpeters and singers joined in unison, as with one voice, to give praise and thanks to the Lord. Accompanied by trumpets, cymbals and other instruments, they raised their voices in praise to the Lord and sang: "He is good; his love endures forever." Then the temple of the Lord was filled with a cloud, and the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the temple of God.

4. A few generations later, one of Asaph's descendants gave the powerful prophecy that encouraged King Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah when threatening armies were headed toward Jerusalem (ca. mid-800's B.C.)

2 CHRONICLES 20:14-19

Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jahaziel son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah, a Levite and descendant of Asaph, as he stood in the assembly. He said: "Listen, King Jehoshaphat and all who live in Judah and Jerusalem! This is what the Lord says to you: 'Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God's. Tomorrow march down against them. They will be climbing up by the Pass of Ziz, and you will find them at the end of the gorge in the Desert of Jeruel. You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the Lord will give you, O Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the Lord will be with you.'" Jehoshaphat bowed with his face to the ground, and all the people of Judah and Jerusalem fell down in worship before the Lord. Then some Levites from the Kohathites and Korahites stood up and praised the Lord, the God of Israel, with very loud voice.

5. Asaph's songs were used in the great revival service hosted by King Hezekiah at Jerusalem (ca. mid-700's B.C.) Asaph is called a "seer" in the historical record.

2 CHRONICLES 29:25-31

He stationed the Levites in the temple of the Lord with cymbals, harps and lyres in the way prescribed by David and Gad the king's seer and Nathan the prophet; this was commanded by the Lord through his prophets. So the Levites stood ready with David's instruments, and the priests with their trumpets. Hezekiah gave the order to sacrifice the burnt offering on the altar. As the offering began, singing to the Lord began also, accompanied by trumpets and the instruments of David king of Israel. The whole assembly bowed in worship, while the singers sang and the trumpeters played. All this continued until the sacrifice of the burnt offering was completed. When the offerings were finished, the king and everyone present with him knelt down and worshiped. King Hezekiah and his officials ordered the Levites to praise the Lord with the words of David and of Asaph the seer. So they sang praises with gladness and bowed their heads and worshiped. Then Hezekiah said, "You have now dedicated yourselves to the Lord. Come and bring sacrifices and thank offerings to the temple of the Lord." So the assembly brought sacrifices and thank offerings, and all whose hearts were willing brought burnt offerings.

6. Asaph's descendants were ministering in music at the celebration of the Passover hosted by King Josiah at Jerusalem (ca. mid-600's B.C.).

2 CHRONICLES 35:15

The musicians, the descendants of Asaph, were in the places prescribed by David, Asaph, Heman and Jeduthun the king's seer. The gatekeepers at each gate did not need to leave their posts, because their fellow Levites made the preparations for them.

7. Asaph's descendants returned to Jerusalem after the Babylonian exile (EZRA 2:41 and NEHEMIAH 7:44) and were present and ministering at the laying of the foundation of the Second Temple under the direction of Zerubbabel the Governor (ca. mid-400's B.C.).

EZRA 3:10-11

When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, the priests in their vestments and with trumpets, and the Levites (the sons of Asaph) with cymbals, took their places to praise the Lord, as prescribed by David king of Israel. With praise and thanksgiving they sang to the Lord: "He is good; his love to Israel endures forever." And all the people gave a great shout of praise to the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid.

8. Asaph's descendants were assigned by Nehemiah to minister in music on top of the newly rebuilt walls of Jerusalem after the people had returned from Babylonian exile (ca. mid-400's B.C.).

NEHEMIAH 12:31-47

I had the leaders of Judah go up on top of the wall. I also assigned two large choirs to give thanks. One was to proceed on top of the wall to the right, toward the Dung Gate. Hoshaiah and half the leaders of Judah followed them, along with Azariah, Ezra, Meshullam, Judah, Benjamin, Shemaiah, Jeremiah, as well as some priests with trumpets, and also Zechariah son of Jonathan, the son of Shemaiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Micaiah, the son of Zaccur, the son of Asaph, and his associates—Shemaiah, Azarel, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethanel, Judah and Hanani—with musical instruments[prescribed by] David the man of God. Ezra the scribe led the procession. At the Fountain Gate they continued directly up the steps of the City of David on the ascent to the wall and passed above the house of David to the Water Gate on the east. The second choir proceeded in the opposite direction. I followed them on top of the wall, together with half the people—past the Tower of the Ovens to the Broad Wall, over the Gate of Ephraim, the Jeshanah Gate, the Fish Gate, the Tower of Hananel and the Tower of the Hundred, as far as the Sheep Gate. At the Gate of the Guard they stopped. The two choirs that gave thanks then took their places in the house of God; so did I, together with half the officials, as well as the priests—Eliakim, Maaseiah, Miniamin, Micaiah, Elioenai, Zechariah and Hananiah with their trumpets— and also Maaseiah, Shemaiah, Eleazar, Uzzi, Jehohanan, Malkijah, Elam and Ezer. The choirs sang under the direction of Jezrahiah. And on that day they offered great sacrifices, rejoicing because God had given them great joy. The women and children also rejoiced. The sound of rejoicing in Jerusalem could be heard far away. At that time men were appointed to be in charge of the storerooms for the contributions, firstfruits and tithes. From the fields around the towns they were to bring into the storerooms the portions required by the Law for the priests and the Levites, for Judah was pleased with the ministering priests and Levites. They performed the service of their God and the service of purification, as did also the singers and gatekeepers, according to the commands of David and his son Solomon. For long ago, in the days of David and Asaph, there had been directors for the singers and for the songs of praise and thanksgiving to God. So in the days of Zerubbabel and of Nehemiah, all Israel contributed the daily portions for the singers and gatekeepers. They also set aside the portion for the other Levites, and the Levites set aside the portion for the descendants of Aaron.

9. Twelve psalms are ascribed to Asaph (50–73–74–75–76–77–78–79–80–81–82–83).