

Psalm 73

Just as the readings in **Leviticus 1-2** described the division and cutting apart of the different parts of the sacrifice, and the washing of the inward parts of the sacrifices, this psalm declares "I was as a beast before thee" pointing to the sacrificial animal representing a substitute for the offerer. The psalm mentions many parts of the body and the ways the inward parts can be rendered unclean:

Examples: A clean heart, my feet were almost gone, Their eyes stand out with fatness, They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth, washed my hands in innocency, my heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my reins (kidneys), thou hast holden me by my right hand, My flesh and my heart faileth.

There is a key mention of the "sanctuary" i.e. the Tabernacle Holy Place in **verse 17**.

The final verse, "But it is good for me to draw near to God," touches on the meaning of "offering" - korban - "to draw near."

verse 21 - Thus my heart was grieved (*chametz* = leavened) and my reins (kidneys) pierced.

Superscript: A Psalm of Asaph. Asaph was not only a skillful musician, but also was a divinely inspired composer of psalms (**2 Chronicles 29:30**). It can also be translated "a psalm for Asaph", or "unto Asaph" i.e. by David, giving it to Asaph for use in a particular public worship service. But the Targum has "a song by the hands of Asaph,"

Psalm 73:1 - Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart.

"Truly" - Yet, or nevertheless - an abrupt introduction, it states the bottom line of his meditations on why the wicked seem to prosper.

A clean heart:

Our hearts are naturally unclean because of the fall:

- **Genesis 6:5** - "Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great upon the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was altogether evil all the time."

- **Genesis 8:21** - "...the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth"

- **Jeremiah 17:9** - "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?"

- **Proverbs 20:9** - "Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?"

- **Psalm 51:5** - "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive

me."

- **Job 14:4** - "Who can bring clean out of unclean? No one!"

- **Ecclesiastes 7:20** - "For there is not a just man on earth, that does good, and sins not."

And yet:

- **Psalm 18:26** - "With the pure thou wilt shew thyself pure; and with the froward thou wilt shew thyself froward."

- **Psalm 24:3-4** - "Who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to falsehood, who does not swear deceitfully."

- **Psalm 51:10** - "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."
"

- **Matthew 5:8** - "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God."

Only faith in the blood of Christ can create a clean heart, because only Christ's heart was clean:

- **Hebrews 10:22** - "let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water."

- **Ezekiel 36:25** - "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you."

- **John 15:3** - "You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you."

- **Ephesians 5:26** - "so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word"

The problem of Evil

If we're honest, each of us at some point confronts what seems at the moment to be an inescapable fact - God as forsaken the earth. It might be a personal loss, or a national catastrophe, or a natural disaster. To our eyes, God does not intervene, prayers appear to go unanswered, the wicked oppress the weak without justice, and evil escapes judgment. At this crucial point, scriptural explanations seem like platitudes, and chance and randomness replace God's orderly creation, and we find ourselves falling into an unknowable and bottomless abyss, completely out of control.

The psalmist confronted such a situation, and we need to examine his transition back into faith and confidence in God.

Rashi - Although I cry out and am dismayed at Israel's troubles, I knew that the Holy One, blessed be He, is good to them, and that He brings evil upon them for their own good, in order to give them merit in the life of the world to come.

"God is good to Israel":

Compare to **Romans 8:28** - "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

Israel encompasses the faithful, the company of believers who make up the Bride of Christ on earth.

We are to expect suffering and tribulation, as we "partake in Christ's sufferings."

- **1 Peter 4:12-13** - "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy."

- **1 Peter 4:19** - "Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator."

- **1 Peter 1:6-8** - "Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory"

Psalm 73:2 - "But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped."

He almost lost his footing in the slippery places of life's journey, asking how God could be good in the face life's evil and the success of wicked men.

"slipped" = *shuppechu* - were almost poured forth like water upon the ground, which is unstable, and runs hither and thither with great disorder and uncertainty.

Psalm 73:3 - "For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked."

"foolish" = *halal* - like the Hallel, the great songs of praise sung on the pilgrimage feasts. The idea is the wicked are singing great praises to themselves, and the world also praises them for their success. In this interpretation, the meaning becomes "the mad" or the foolish. The Jewish translation has "perverse."

prosperity = *shalom* - rest, peace, health and wholeness, tranquility, safety,

completeness

Psalm 73:4 - "For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm."

bands = *chartsubbah* - fetters, pains

- **Isaiah 58:6** - "Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?"

Rashi - Those who die among them die healthy, [strong as] a palace, without pains. But our Rabbis explained חַרְצָבוֹת as an abbreviation, meaning that they are not (שאינו) frightened (חרדיו) or saddened (עצביו) by the day of death (Shab. 31b).

The Pride of the Wicked

Psalm 73:5-9 - "They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment. Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish. They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression: they speak loftily. They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth."

Rashi - "they speak about the Most High": e.g. Pharaoh, Sennacherib, and Nebuchadnezzar. [Pharaoh said] (Exodus 5:2): "Who is the Lord that I should obey Him?" [Sennacherib said] (Isaiah 36:20), "Who are they among all the gods of the lands...?" [Nebuchadnezzar said] (Isaiah 14:14), "I will ascend above the heights of the clouds." That is the meaning of: "They have set their mouth against Heaven."

"their tongue walketh through the earth" - (NET) lay claim to the earth.

Psalm 73:10 - "Therefore his people return hither: and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them."

i.e. God's people will be tempted to "turn" toward the self-congratulatory life of the wicked.

Rashi - "and the waters of the full are drain water to them": And the waters of the full stream (they are words of Torah) are considered by them as water that drains out, and they despise them.

Psalm 73:11 - "And they say, How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the most High?"

One of many phrases used in the Bible to describe this mind-set of abandoning God. - like "God has forsaken the earth" and "it is vain thing to serve the living God."

See **Malachi 3:14** - "Ye have said, It is vain to serve God: and what profit is it that we

have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts?"

- **Ezekiel 9:9** - "...the city full of perverseness: for they say, The LORD hath forsaken the earth, and the LORD seeth not."

Psalm 73:13-14 - "Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency. For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning."

This is not the psalmist talking, but the people, continuing their complaint against God.

Psalm 73:15 - "If I say, I will speak thus; behold, I should offend against the generation of thy children."

Rashi - That is to say, that if I "tell it as it is" I would make [the generation of your children] into traitors and wicked men. (i.e. because that is what this whole generation has been saying)

Psalm 73:16-17 - "When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end."

The sanctuary = *miqdash* - the Tabernacle, the Holy Place where God dwells with Israel

- **Isaiah 8:14** - "And he shall be for a sanctuary; H4720 but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem."

- **Ezekiel 9:6** - "Slay utterly old and young, both maids, and little children, and women: but come not near any man upon whom is the mark; and begin at my sanctuary."

- **Ezekiel 37:26** - "Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them: and I will place them, and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary H4720 in the midst of them for evermore."

"then understood I their end" - '*acharyth* - end, latter times (prophetic future time)

- **Deuteronomy 32:29** - "O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!"

- **Psalm 37:37-38** - "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace. But the transgressors shall be destroyed together: the end of the wicked shall be cut off."

- **Proverbs 14:12** - "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death."

Psalm 73:20 - "As a dream when one awaketh; so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou

shalt despise their image."

The wicked are as insubstantial as a fading dream, and not regarded at all by the one who wakes up.

Psalm 73:21 - "Thus my heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my reins."

"grieved" = *chametz* - leavened, puffed up in these false conceits.

"reins" = *kilyah* - kidneys, inward parts

Psalm 73:22 - "So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee."

Psalm 73:24 - "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory."

"took" = *laqach* - take a in a wide variety of meanings - the same word as is used in the account of Enoch's translation

"glory" = *kabowd* - the presence of God

- **Genesis 5:24** - "And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him."

Psalm 73:27-28 - "For, lo, they that are far from thee shall perish: thou hast destroyed all them that go a whoring from thee. But it is good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord GOD, that I may declare all thy works."

This is the "end" of the wicked, and also of believers - one is destroyed, the other lives in the presence of God.

"to draw near" = *qĕrabah* - from *qarab* - to offer, approach the altar with a sacrifice

In light of the Gospel, drawing near to God involves becoming a living sacrifice.