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A Psalm by Asaph.

PSALM 73: 1 Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart.

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The psalmist speaks of God's goodness to his people, Psa 73:1; shows how much he was stumbled at the prosperity of the wicked, and describes their state, Psa 73:2-12; details the process of the temptation, and the pain he suffered in consequence, Psa 73:13-16; shows how he was delivered, and the dismal reverse of the state of the once prosperous ungodly man, by which his own false views were corrected, Psa 73:17-22; his great confidence in God, and the good consequences of it, Psa 73:23-28.

This is the commencement of the Third Book of the Psalter; and the Psalm before us has for title, A Psalm of Asaph; or, as the margin has it, A Psalm for Asaph. The title in the Hebrew is מִזְמוֹר לְאַסָּף mizmor leasaph; "A Psalm of Asaph:" and it is likely that this Asaph was the composer of it; that he lived under the Babylonish captivity; and that he published this Psalm to console the Israelites under bondage, who were greatly tried to find themselves in such outward distress and misery, while a people much more wicked and corrupt than they, were in great prosperity, and held them in bondage.

Verse 1

Truly God is good to Israel - Captives as they were, they still had many blessings from God; and they had promises of deliverance, which must be fulfilled in due time.

Such as are of a clean heart - Those who have a clean heart must have inward happiness: and, because they resemble God, they can never be forsaken by him.

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PSALM 73: 2 But as for me, my feet were almost gone. My steps had nearly slipped.

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Verse 2

My feet were almost gone - I had nearly given up my confidence. I was ready to find fault with the dispensations of providence; and thought the Judge of all the earth did not do right.

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PSALM 73: 3 For I was envious of the arrogant, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

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Verse 3

I was envious at the foolish - I saw persons who worshipped not the true God, and others who were abandoned to all vices, in possession of every temporal comfort, while the godly were in straits, difficulties, and affliction. I began then to doubt whether there was a wise providence; and my mind became irritated. It seems to have been a maxim among the ancient heathens, Θεου ονειδος τους κακους ευδαιμονειν, "The prosperity of the wicked is a reproach to the gods." But they had no just conception of a state of future rewards and punishments. Besides, man could not bear prosperity. If

men had uninterrupted comforts here, perhaps not one soul would ever seek a preparation for heaven. Human trials and afflictions, the general warfare of human life, are the highest proof of a providence as benevolent as it is wise. Were the state of human affairs different from what it is, hell would be more thickly peopled; and there would be fewer inhabitants in glory. There is reason to doubt whether there would be any religion upon earth had we nothing but temporal prosperity. Indeed, all the following verses are proofs of it.

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PSALM 73: 4 For there are no struggles in their death, but their strength is firm.

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#### Verse 4

No bands in their death - Many of the godly have sore conflicts at their death. Their enemy then thrusts sore at them that they may fall; or that their confidence in their God may be shaken. But of this the ungodly know nothing. Satan will not molest them; he is sure of his prey; they are entangled, and cannot now break their nets; their consciences are seared, they have no sense of guilt. If they think at all of another world, they presume on that mercy which they never sought, and of which they have no distinct notion. Perhaps, "they die without a sigh or a groan; and thus go off as quiet as a lamb" - to the slaughter.

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PSALM 73: 5 They are free from burdens of men, neither are they plagued like other men.

PSALM 73: 6 Therefore pride is like a chain around their neck. Violence covers them like a garment.

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#### Verse 6

Pride compasseth them about as a chain - Perhaps there is an allusion here to the office which some of them bore. Chains of gold, and golden rings, were ensigns of magistracy and civil power. As these chains encompassed their necks, or the rings their wrists and fingers, as the signs of the offices in virtue of which they acted; so **חמס** *chamas*, violence, oppressive conduct, encompassed them. They made no other use of their great power, than to oppress the poor and the needy; and to drive things to extremities. The Chaldee, instead of a chain, represents this as a crown or diadem, which they had formed out of the plunder of the poor and defenseless.

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PSALM 73: 7 Their eyes bulge with fat. Their minds pass the limits of conceit.

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#### Verse 7

Their eyes stand out with fatness - "Their countenance is changed because of fatness." - Chaldee. By fatness, or corpulency, the natural lines of the face are changed, or rather obliterated. The characteristic distinctions are gone; and we see little remaining besides the human hog.

They have more than heart could wish - I doubt this translation. Whose heart ever said, I have enough, which had not its portion with God? It would be more literal to say, "They surpass the thoughts of their heart." They have more than they expected, though not more than they wish.

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PSALM 73: 8 They scoff and speak with malice. In arrogance, they threaten oppression.

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Verse 8

They are corrupt - ימ'קו yamiku, they mock, act dissolutely.

And speak wickedly concerning oppression - They vindicate excessive acts of government: they push justice to its rigour. They neither show equity, lenity, nor mercy; they are cruel, and they vindicate their proceedings.

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PSALM 73: 9 They have set their mouth in the heavens. Their tongue walks through the earth.

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Verse 9

Set their mouth against the heavens - They blaspheme God, ridicule religion, mock at Providence, and laugh at a future state.

Their tongue walketh through the earth - They find fault with every thing; they traduce the memory of the just in heaven, and ridicule the saints that are upon earth. They criticize every dispensation of God.

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PSALM 73: 10 Therefore their people return to them, and they drink up waters of abundance.

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Verse 10

Therefore his people return hither - There are very few verses in the Bible that have been more variously translated than this; and, like the man in the fable, they have blown the hot to cool it, and the cold to warm it. It has been translated, "Therefore God's people fall off to them; and thence they reap no small advantage." And, "Therefore let his people come before them; and waters in full measure would be wrung out from them." That is, "Should God's people come before them, they would squeeze them to the utmost; they would wring out all the juice in their bodies." The Chaldee has, "Therefore, are they turned against the people of the Lord, that they may bruise and beat them with mallets; that they may pour out to them abundance of tears." The Vulgate, "Therefore shall my people return here, and days of abundance shall be found by them." The Septuagint is the same. The Ethiopic, Arabic, and Syriac, nearly the same. The Hebrew text is, לכן ישוב עמו הלא ומי מלא ימצו למו lachen yashub ammo (עמי ammi) halom; umey male yimmatsu lamo; "Therefore shall my people be converted, where they shall find abundance of waters." That is, The people, seeing the iniquity of the Babylonians, and feeling their oppressive hand, shall be converted to me; and I shall bring them to their own land, where they shall find an abundance of all the necessaries of life. I believe this to

be the meaning; and thus we find their afflictions were sanctified to them; for they obliged them to return to God, and then God caused them to return to their own land. The Vulgate translates מלא וּמַי umey male, "abundance of waters," by et dies pleni, "and days of plenty;" for it has read ימי yemey, days, for וּמַי umey, and waters. Almost all the Versions support this reading; but it is not acknowledged by any MS. The old Psalter is here mutilated.

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PSALM 73: 11 They say, "How does God know? Is there knowledge in the Most High?"

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Verse 11

They say, How doth God know? - My people are so stumbled with the prosperity of the wicked, that they are ready in their temptation to say, "Surely, God cannot know these things, or he would never dispense his favors thus." Others consider these words as the saying of the wicked: "We may oppress these people as we please, and live as we list; God knows nothing about it."

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PSALM 73: 12 Behold, these are the wicked. Being always at ease, they increase in riches.

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Verse 12

These are the ungodly - The people still speak. It is the ungodly that prosper, the irreligious and profane.

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PSALM 73: 13 Surely in vain I have cleansed my heart, and washed my hands in innocence,

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Verse 13

I have cleansed my heart in vain - It is no advantage to us to worship the true God, to walk according to the law of righteousness, and keep the ordinances of the Most High.

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PSALM 73: 14 For all day long have I been plagued, and punished every morning.

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Verse 14

For all the day long have I been plagued - Far from enjoying worldly prosperity, we are not only poor, but we are afflicted also; and every succeeding day brings with it some new trouble.

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PSALM 73: 15 If I had said, "I will speak thus"; behold, I would have betrayed the generation of your children.

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## Verse 15

If I say, I will speak thus - I have at last discovered that I have reasoned incorrectly; and that I have the uniform testimony of all thy children against me. From generation to generation they have testified that the Judge of all the earth does right; they have trusted in thee, and were never confounded. They also met with afflictions and sore trials, but thou didst bring them safely through all, didst sustain them in the worst, and sanctifiedst the whole to their eternal good.

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PSALM 73: 16 When I tried to understand this, it was too painful for me;

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## Verse 16

When I thought to know this - When I reviewed the history of our fathers, I saw that, though thou hadst from time to time hidden thy face because of their sins, yet thou hadst never utterly abandoned them to their adversaries; and it was not reasonable to conclude that thou wouldst do now what thou hadst never done before; and yet the continuance of our captivity, the oppressive hardships which we suffer, and the small prospect there is of release, puzzle me again. These things have been very painful to me.

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PSALM 73: 17 Until I entered God's sanctuary, and considered their latter end.

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## Verse 17

Until I went into the sanctuary - Until, in the use of thy ordinances, I entered into a deep consideration of thy secret counsels, and considered the future state of the righteous and the wicked; that the unequal distribution of temporal good and evil argued a future judgment; that the present is a state of trial; and that God exercises his followers according to his godly wisdom and tender mercy. Then light sprang up in my mind, and I was assured that all these exercises were for our benefit, and that the prosperity of the wicked here was a prelude to their destruction. And this I saw to be their end.

That this Psalm was written during the captivity, there is little room to doubt. How then can the psalmist speak of the sanctuary? There was none at Babylon; and at Jerusalem it had been long since destroyed? There is no way to solve this difficulty but by considering that *מִקְדָּשׁ* mikdeshey may be taken in the sense of holy places - places set apart for prayer and meditation. And that the captives had such places in them captivity, there can be no doubt; and the place that is set apart to meet God in, for prayer, supplication, confession of sin, and meditation, is holy unto the Lord; and is, therefore, his sanctuary, whether a house or the open field. Calmet thinks by holy meditations a view of the Divine secrets, to which he refers, Psa 73:24, is here meant.

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PSALM 73: 18 Surely you set them in slippery places. You throw them down to destruction.

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## Verse 18

Thou didst set them on slippery places - Affluence is a slippery path; few have ever walked in it without falling. It is possible to be faithful in the unrighteous mammon, but it is very difficult. No man should desire riches; for they bring with them so many cares and temptations as to be almost unmanageable. Rich men, even when pious, are seldom happy; they do not enjoy the consolations of religion. A good man, possessed of very extensive estates, unblamable in his whole deportment, once said to me: "There must be some strange malignity in riches thus to keep me in continual bondage, and deprive me of the consolations of the Gospel." Perhaps to a person to whom his estates are a snare, the words of our Lord may be literally applicable: "Sell what thou hast, and give to the poor; and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up thy cross, and follow me." But he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions! May we not then say with the psalmist, Surely thou didst set them in slippery places, etc.?

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PSALM 73: 19 How they are suddenly destroyed! They are completely swept away with terrors.

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#### Verse 19

Are they brought into desolation - This is often a literal fact. I have known several cases where persons, very rich, have by sudden losses been brought into desolation as in a moment; in consequence of which they were utterly consumed in terrors.

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PSALM 73: 20 As a dream when one wakes up, so, Lord, when you awake, you will despise their fantasies.

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#### Verse 20

As a dream when one awaketh - So their goods fled away. Their possession was a dream - their privation, real.

Thou shalt despise their image - While destitute of true religion, whatever appearance they had of greatness, nobility, honor, and happiness; yet in the sight of God they had no more than the ghost or shade of excellence which God is said here to despise. Who would be rich at such risk and dishonor?

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PSALM 73: 21 For my soul was grieved. I was embittered in my heart.

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#### Verse 21

Thus my heart was grieved - The different views which I got of this subject quite confounded me; I was equally astonished at their sudden overthrow and my own ignorance. I felt as if I were a beast in stupidity. I permitted my mind to be wholly occupied with sensible things, like the beasts that perish and did not look into a future state; nor did I consider, nor submit to, the wise designs of an unerring Providence.

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PSALM 73: 22 I was so senseless and ignorant. I was a brute beast before you.

PSALM 73: 23 Nevertheless, I am continually with you. You have held my right hand.

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Verse 23

I am continually with thee - I now see that myself and my people are under thy guardian care; that we are continually upheld by thee; and while in thy right hand, we shall not be utterly cast down.

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PSALM 73: 24 You will guide me with your counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.

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Verse 24

Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel - After we have suffered awhile, receiving directions and consolations from thy good Spirit, by means of thy prophets, who are in the same captivity with ourselves; thou wilt grant us deliverance, restore us to our own land, and crown us with honor and happiness. Any sincere follower of God may use these words in reference to this and the coming world. Thy counsel - thy Word and Spirit, shall guide me through life; and when I have done and suffered thy righteous will, thou wilt receive me into thy eternal glory.

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PSALM 73: 25 Whom do I have in heaven? There is no one on earth whom I desire besides you.

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Verse 25

Whom have I in heaven but thee? - The original is more emphatic: מי לי בשמים ועמך לא חפצתי בארץ; mi li bashshamayim; veimmecha lo chaphatsti baarets. "Who is there to me in the heavens? And with thee I have desired nothing in the earth." No man can say this who has not taken God for his portion in reference to both worlds.

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PSALM 73: 26 My flesh and my heart fails, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

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Verse 26

My flesh - faileth - I shall soon die: and my heart - even my natural courage, will fail; and no support but what is supernatural will then be available. Therefore, he adds:

God is the strength of my heart - Literally, the rock of my heart.

And my portion - Allusion is here made to the division of the promised land. I ask no inheritance below; I look for one above. I do not look for this in the possession of any place; it is God alone that can content the desires and wishes of an immortal spirit. And even this would not satisfy, had I not the prospect of its being for ever, לעולם leolum, "to eternity!"

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PSALM 73: 27 For, behold, those who are far from you shall perish. You have destroyed all those who are unfaithful to you.

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Verse 27

They that are far from thee shall perish - The term perish is generally used to signify a coming to nothing, being annihilated; and by some it is thus applied to the finally impenitent, they shall all be annihilated. But where is this to be found in the Scriptures? In no part, properly understood. In the new heavens and the new earth none of the wicked shall be found; for therein dwells righteousness - nothing but God and righteous spirits; but at the same time the wicked shall be in their own place. And to suppose that they shall be annihilated, is as great a heresy, though scarcely so absurd, as to believe that the pains of damnation are emendatory, and that hellfire shall burn out. There is presumptive evidence from Scripture to lead us to the conclusion, that if there be not eternal punishment, glory will not be eternal; as the same terms are used to express the duration of both. No human spirit that is not united to God can be saved. Those who are Far from Thee shall perish - they shall be lost, undone, ruined, and that without remedy. Being separated from God by sin, they shall never be rejoined; the great gulf must be between them and their Maker eternally.

All them that go a whoring from thee - That is, all that worship false gods; all idolaters. This is the only meaning of the word in such a connection. I have explained this elsewhere.

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PSALM 73: 28 But it is good for me to come close to God. I have made the Lord the LORD my refuge, that I may tell of all your works.

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Verse 28

It is good for me to draw near - We have already seen that those who are far off shall perish; therefore, it is ill for them. Those who draw near - who come in the true spirit of sacrifice, and with the only available offering, the Lord Jesus, shall be finally saved; therefore, it is good for them.

I have put my trust in the Lord God - I confide in Jehovah, my Prop and Stay. I have taken him for my portion.

That I may declare all thy works - That I may testify to all how good it is to draw nigh to God; and what a sufficient portion he is to the soul of man.

The Vulgate, Septuagint, Ethiopic, and Arabic, add, in the gates of the daughter of Sion. These words appear to make a better finish; but they are not acknowledged by any Hebrew MS.