

THE PSALMS

BOOK THE THIRD

PSALM 73

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

Temptation, arising from the Prosperity of the Lawless,
Triumphantly Overcome.

ANALYSIS

Stanza I., vers. 1-5, Under Protest, the Psalmist Confesses how Nearly he had Fallen, by Observing the Prosperity of the Lawless. Stanza II., vers. 6-9, The Evil Wrought in the Lawless Themselves by their Prosperity. Stanza III., vers. 10-14, The Evil Wrought in Others, breeding Sceptical Discontent. Stanza IV., vers. 15-17, The Psalmist's Recoil from the Natural Effect of such a Frank but Incomplete Statement, leads him to Seek More Light. Stanza V., vers., 18-20, The Startling Picture which More Light Reveals. Stanzas VI, VII, VIII, vers. 21, 22; 23, 24; 25, 26, The Psalmist Shames Away his Temptation in three stanzas of great power. Stanza IX., vers. 27, 28, A Final Contrast, Culminating in Public Song.

(Lm.) Psalm—By Asaph.

- 1 After all God is good to Israel
to the pure in heart.
- 2 But as for me
my feet had well-nigh stumbled,
my steps had almost slipped;
- 3 For I was envious of the boasters,
at the prosperity of the lawless I kept looking.
- 4 For unfettered they are,
sound¹ and fat is their body:

1. So Gt.—Gn. Cp. O.G. 359a.

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- 5 Of the travail of common men have they none,
nor with the earth-born are they wont to be smitten.
- 6 Therefore a necklace for them is haughtiness,
violence doth envelope them as their garment:
- 7 Their iniquity² hath proceeded from fatness,
the imaginations of the heart have overflowed:
- 8 They mock and wickedly speak oppression,
from on high they speak:
- 9 They have set in the heavens their mouth,
and their tongue marcheth through the earth.
- 10 Therefore his people turn back hither,
and waters of abundance are discovered³ by them;
- 11 And they say—"How doth GOD know?
and is there knowledge in the Most High?
- 12 Lo! these are lawless men;
and yet secure for an age they have attained wealth!
- 13 After all in vain have I cleansed my heart,
and bathed in pureness my palms;⁴
- 14 And been smitten all the day,
and been rebuked morning by morning!"
- 15 "If" thought I "I must recount such things as these⁵
lo! the circle of thy sons shall I have betrayed."
- 16 So I began to think in order to understand this,—
a travail was that in mine eyes:—
- 17 Until I could enter the great sanctuary⁶ of GOD,
could give heed to their future.⁷
- 18 After all in slippery places dost thou set them,
thou hast let them fall into ruins:
- 19 How have they become a desolation in a moment,
come to an end been consumed in consequence of terrors!
- 20 As a dream by one who awakeneth
Sovereign Lord! when thou bestirrest thyself their image
wilt thou despise.

2. So it shd. be (w. Sep., Syr., Vul.)—Gn.

3. So some cod. (w. Sep., Syr., Vul.)—Gn. M.T.: "drained out"—Dr. "Supped up"—Del.

4. With special allusion to bribery. "Here evidently referring to the keeping of the palms clean from bribery, robbery and just those forms of violence (ver. 6b) and oppression (ver. 8b) by which the wicked had to a great extent gained their wealth and prosperity"—Br.

5. So, conjecturally, O.G. 456a.

6. Ml.: "holy places," or (possibly) "holy things."

7. Cp. on 37:37, 38.

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- 21 If my heart should become embittered,
and in my feelings⁸ I should be wounded
- 22 Then should I be brutish and without knowledge,
a stupid beast⁹ should I have become with thee.
- 23 And yet I am continually with thee,
thou hast grasped my right hand :
- 24 By thy counsel wilt thou guide me,
and afterwards gloriously take me.
- 25 Who (is there) for me in the heavens ?
and with thee¹⁰ I have no delight on the earth.
- 26 When have failed my flesh and my heart
the rock of my heart and my portion is God to the ages.
- 27 For lo! they who have gone far from thee shall perish,
thou wilt have exterminated every unchaste wanderer from
thee.
- 28 But as for me approach to God for me is blessedness.
I have fixed in Adonai Jehovah my refuge,
to tell of all thy praises
in the gates of the daughter of Zion.¹¹

(Nm.)

PARAPHRASE

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How good God is to Israel—to those whose hearts are pure.

2 But as for me, I came so close to the edge of the cliff!
My feet were slipping and I was almost gone.

3 For I was envious of the prosperity of the proud and
wicked.

4 Yes, all through life their road is smooth!¹ They grow
sleek and fat.

5 They aren't always in trouble and plagued with problems
like everyone else,

6 So their pride sparkles like a jeweled necklace, and their
clothing is woven of cruelty!

7 These fat cats have everything their hearts could ever
wish for!

8. U.: "reins."

9. Ml.: "A hippopotamus"—"a plump colossus of flesh . . . emblem of
colossal stupidity"—Del.

10. "Having thee"—Dr.

11. Thus found in Sep. and Vul., as in 9:14.

1. Or, "they never have any pains."

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8 They scoff at God and threaten His people. How proudly they speak!

9 They boast against the very heavens, and their words strut through the earth.

10 And so God's people are dismayed and confused, and drink it all in.

11 "Does God realize what is going on?" they ask.

12 "Look at these men of arrogance; they never have to lift a finger—theirs is a life of ease; and all the time their riches multiply."

13 Have I been wasting my time? Why take the trouble to be pure?

14 All I get out of it is trouble and woe—every day and all day long!

15 If I had really said that, I would have been a traitor to Your people.

16 Yet it is so hard to explain it—this prosperity of those who hate the Lord.

17 Then one day I went into God's sanctuary to meditate, and thought about the future of these evil men.

18 What a slippery path they are on—suddenly God will send them sliding over the edge of the cliff and down to their destruction:

19 An instant end to all their happiness, and eternity of terror.

20 Their present life is only a dream! They will awaken to the truth as one awakens from a dream of things that never really were!

21 When I saw this, what turmoil filled my heart!

22 I saw myself so stupid and so ignorant; I must seem like an animal to You, O God.

23 But even so, You love me! You are holding my right hand!

24 You will keep on guiding me all my life with Your wisdom and counsel; and afterwards receive me into the glories of heaven!

25 Whom have I in heaven but You? And I desire no one on earth as much as You!

26 My health fails; my spirits droop, yet God remains! He is the strength of my heart; He is mine forever!

2. Or, "You will bring me unto honor."

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27 But those refusing to worship God will perish, for He destroys those serving other gods.

28 But as for me, I get as close to Him as I can! I have chosen Him and I will tell everyone about the wonderful ways He rescues me.

EXPOSITION

It is fortunate that the uniform rendering of the expressive particle *ak*, in vers. 1, 13, and 18 of this psalm, has led to such a striking commencement of a poem which embraces a precious mental history; since, by the combination, in that little word, of an affirmative with a restrictive meaning, it so happily opens the whole case, as to suggest to Perowne the following amplification: "Yes, it is so; after all, God is good, notwithstanding all my doubts." This entitles him to say of the psalmist: "That the result of the conflict is stated before the conflict itself is described. There is no parade of doubt merely as doubt. He states *first*, and in the most natural way, the *final* conviction of his heart."

The next point of importance is suggested by a comparison of 81:26 ("To the pure thou didst shew thyself pure") with the final clause of the psalmist's first statement—to *the pure in heart*. Only a pure mind can vindicate a pure God. In confessing how nearly he had lost his confidence in God's goodness, the psalmist admits that his thoughts had, in a measure, become defiled: he had looked, he had lusted—without taking moral quality into account. Happily, he looked again: until he saw something more than prosperity; and that later look helped to clarify his thoughts. But at first he lingeringly viewed the glitter and the show, until he felt his feet slipping from under him. His attention had clearly been arrested by fascinating examples of godless prosperity: examples shewing the absence of fettering restrictions, sound health, freedom from common troubles, immunity from providential inflictions. It should here be noted how a premature and disturbing notice of the "death" of those well-to-do godless men is avoided, by a critical revision of the Hebrew text, which after all amounts to no more than a re-grouping of the Hebrew letters. Premature such an allusion would certainly be; "for surely," says Delitzsch, "the poet cannot begin the description of the prosperity of the ungodly with the painlessness of their death, and only then come to speak of their healthfulness." Moreover, when afterwards, in vers. 18, 19, the psalmist does

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undoubtedly confront the death of the lawless, it is very doubtful whether he intends to imply that it is painless. At all events, in his first stanza he confines himself to the fascination of the godless lives to which his attention had been repeatedly drawn.

In the second stanza, however, while the fascination still lingers, certain repulsive features begin to obtrude themselves. A *necklace* and a *flowing robe* are, no doubt, signs of opulence and social importance; but, when the former of these is *haughtiness* and the latter is *violence*, then, alas! for those who have to suffer from them. *Fatness* generates *iniquity*: perverse *imaginings overflow* in speech. *Mocking* at things sacred and divine, such assuming and insolent men *speak oppression*, as their appropriate dialect. With open profanity, their *mouth* sets divine law at defiance, and *their tongue* presumes to propose laws concerning all men and things in the *earth* to please themselves—in their unmitigated selfishness. Such is the purport of the second stanza. It is the result of a second look at the prosperous ungodly. It is proof of a determination to look even worldly fascinations full in the face. The discovery is already being made that it is not all gold that glitters; and, as the result, the snare is already nearly broken.

But, as stanza three shews, there is another source of danger to be considered: "WHAT OTHER PEOPLE SAY" sometimes perverts our own judgment. What, then, *do* they say? let us not fear to examine it. That these prosperous lawless ones wield a great influence, is, indeed, too apparent. Not only do they influence their own *clan*—each wealthy prince *his own people*,—as some expositors take ver. 10a to intimate; but even among *His people* that is, God's,—some there may be who are seduced into the expectation of discovering *waters of abundance* where these enviable wealthy men have already found them: And so these admirers reason themselves into scepticism. It is shallow reasoning, but it is taking. "*Look you,*" say these misguided on-lookers, "*these* are such as good people call '*lawless men*'; and yet see how they *get on*: see how, *for a life-time, they have been secure* from providential visitation, and to what *wealth they have attained!* Talk of Providence—where is it? Does God—if there be one—know anything about it?" So much for vers. 10-12 of this stanza.

It is probably best to take vers. 13, 14 as still continuing to describe "what other people say" who are unduly under the influence of the prosperous lawless ones: only, now, another class

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of them comes into view—namely the hitherto punctilious people, more alive to their religious “profit and loss account” than to abstract reasonings about the Divine Government. We need not deny that, by voicing the precise difficulty felt by these whining and selfish religionists, the psalmist, at the same time, provides that his own transient doubts of the like kind shall find expression. Suffice it, that the pernicious influence of the ungodly rich has been amply described.

But it is time that the tables were turned, and a decisive solution of the problem were given; and so, here, at ver. 15, we come to the second part of the psalm. It is observable, that the psalmist resumes where he left off; namely, with the consideration of what others would say—only now the “others” are a very different class from those just described. He now brings before him those whom, in their collective capacity, he terms *the circle of God's sons*, amongst whom, therefore, a sense of the Divine Fatherhood is still preserved. “What will these say,” he seems to ask, “if I frankly tell them of these admirations of the godless rich, and these shallow reasonings about their example; if, at least, I tell the story as though *I for myself* seriously felt its spell? Will they not be shocked that I have so betrayed the honour of our Divine Fatherhood?” Happy the reasoner who has a circle of brethren from whom such a counteracting and healing influence may be counted upon; so that, to think of frankly telling *them* of his mental difficulties, is to feel those difficulties more than half solved by anticipation. Thrice happy was Asaph, that he was one of such a companionship of *pure hearted* Israelites—the more so, because he was both a *thinker* and a *prophet*: as a thinker, able to appreciate the mental *travail* involved in working out a difficult problem (ver. 16); and, as a prophet, knowing by experience how a sudden flash of light from the Spirit of God could at once remove difficulties which no mere thinking could solve (ver. 17). Hence, as he here intimates, although he at once *began to think*, he was not sanguine of the results to be expected from that process alone: he counted much more for success upon such a REVELATION as he felt would be more likely to be vouchsafed amidst the congenial influences of the *great sanctuary of God* than elsewhere: *the great sanctuary*, with its leisure and quiet, with its sacred associations, with its solemn sacrifices, with its inspiring music, and especially with its songs old and new, some of which, like 37 and 49, might be found to have anticipated his present difficulties, or at least to

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favour the making of fresh discoveries by his own mind. It should be noted, however, that the psalmist's late experience and present ponderings are already putting him on the right track for search; that, in fact, he knows the precise point on which he needs illumination: namely the *future* of these ungodly prosperous men: *until I could consider their future*. We do wisely to be thus careful to observe precisely where this stanza breaks off—the exact point to which it leads up; and there can be no mistake that now the language of the psalm leads over from reflection and resolve to that of discovery. In ver. 17 it is resolve: in ver. 18 it is discovery. The discovery is introduced by the significant term *after all*, to which reference has already been made; and the disclosure is thenceforward continued in the form of direct address to Deity. Note the wording: *thou dost set them—thou hast let them fall—when thou bestirrest thyself—their image wilt thou despise*. Plainly it is now the confident language of direct address to Deity. But the language is changed, because the scene has changed: the psalmist is now in *the great sanctuary*, and feels himself to be in the very presence of God, and by the confident directness and assurance of his words shews that he has now *received the further light* which he was resolved to seek concerning *the future* of these ungodly prosperous men. Thus, then, every word of the ensuing stanza demands our most careful attention—and our utmost confidence.

“*After all*,”—he exclaims, in the very language of discovery: “after all the wealth and all the power and show; after all the admiration and envy and the vain reasoning; after all the appearance of thine indifference, as though thou knewest not how thou wast being set at nought: *after all*, thou hast been very much in this very thing, carrying forward thy holy designs. For thou hast been *setting* these very men whom their fellows have so much envied, *in slippery places of uttermost peril*.” We naturally and rightly supply, in undertone, from our other and it may be fuller knowledge of the fairness and equity of God's ways, the important qualification: “Thus—for sins already committed—hast thou been punishing them for their presumption in wilfully persisting in doing without thee.” And it was well, therefore, that we detected, in the first lines sketching the *image* of these men, the note of previous self-determination to evil: they had already become *unfettered*, having brushed aside Divine law and silenced the voice of conscience. “As a punishment for this previous course of sin and self-hardening; and (should we not

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add?) as a last Divine resort to convince them of their folly: *thou dost set them in slippery places.*" Alas! in the actual circumstances revealed to the psalmist, this punishment avails nothing for reformation, but takes effect as punishment with destructive effect. With startling fulness and vigour is this disclosure made: "*Thou hast let them fall into ruins—like a bowing wall which comes down of its own weight with a crash, its ruin being sudden and complete.*" With this revelation the psalmist's mind is deeply impressed—as its exclamatory form shows: "*How have they become a desolation in a moment—so complete! so sudden!*" The final catastrophe is further described by terms piled up for effect: *They have come to an end, have been consumed,*—how could complete destruction be more strongly expressed? But, to this, the significant addition is made: *in consequence of terrors*—who shall venture to say what these terrors are? As in Job 18:11, 14, 24:17, 27:20, 30:15, they may be terrors within the bounds of this life, and closing it; or, as in Ezekiel 26:21, 27:36, 28:19, they may be terrors connected with the Hadean continuation of existence, and ending it. That they do *terminate* the *being* of these erewhile *boasters*, is the one thing which the disclosure makes plain. We have not yet done with this description. Let us complete our notice of it, before we turn back to ask what it all means. With a simple oriental audacity which has in it no particle of irreverence, the psalmist represents the *Sovereign Lord* as having been *asleep* while these godless rich have been indulging their lust of wealth and pomp and power—and cruelty: by all which we understand no more than that Adonai had *interfered* as little as though he had been asleep. But, working out this figurative vein, he says: "*as a dream (is despised) by one who awakeneth, Sovereign Lord! when thou bestirrest thyself (to deal with their case as it demands and deserves) their image wilt thou despise.*" Here, undoubtedly, much depends upon a right appreciation of the word *image*; since, whatever it is, it is something which Adonai *despises*, and it becomes us to be careful how we define an object of avowed Divine *aversion*! Scholars are not quite agreed in their renderings of this instance of the Hebrew *zelem*. The R.V., Perowne and Leeser follow the A.V. in translating it "image"; but Carter and Delitzsch represent it by "shadow," Driver by "semblance," Briggs and Wellhausen (in P.B.) by "phantom." Now, undoubtedly, there is one passage, namely 39:6, in which—by reason of the context—some such rendering

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is required; and it is further undeniable that the notion of "shadow" lies at the root of the original word; for which very reason, however, it is submitted that "image" is the better translation in the present instance; not only as connecting his passage with the account of man's creation in Genesis (1:26, 27, 9:6), and usefully reminding us in passing that even there man's likeness to his Maker—consisting in his capacity to rule (cp. Exposition on Ps. 8) was after all little more than a "shadow" of the Divine capacity and power to govern; but more particularly and most vitally that the very word "image" is *the* term which takes us to the heart of this most weighty passage. "*Their image*—as a mere caricature of thine own, it is, O Sovereign Lord, which *thou wilt despise!*" Assuredly, it is not the mere frailty of man's ordinary mortal condition, which God despises; nor is it the attenuated semblance of man's former self which alone can penetrate hades "as far as the circle of his fathers" (49:19), which God despises. Out of the former, by transformation, he can raise up new men, mighty as angels and immortal as his own Son; and unto the latter, as still "the work of his own hands," he may come to have a "longing," as Job faintly hoped (14:15). Therefore it is neither of these semblances, as such, that Adonai despises; for *despises* is a strong word, and in neither of the above cases is it consistent with the known condescension of "a faithful Creator" (1 P. 4:19). No! far other than merely these, is the object which here starts forth from the canvas as, so to speak, exciting the contempt of an awakened and affronted God. It is the primary image of God, wickedly, wantonly disfigured. Even we, under Asaph's sympathetic guidance, have, already—within the compass of this psalm—looked on that "image" and loathed it: the *unfettered* free-thinker and free-liver; the fat, sleek pamperer of his precious self; the so-called pet of Providence, stranger alike to ordinary and extraordinary trouble; deeming it an adornment to be *haughty*, and a becoming robe to be *violent*; whose gross mind concocts evil schemes; whose vile mouth propounds and promotes and defends unblushing villainies; whose tongue talks as if all the earth had been made for his convenience—a man therefore who practically deems himself to be his own God! *alas turned devil!* Have we by this time learned to detest him? How great a wonder, then, that a holy God should have left him to himself so long!

Such then, in full, is the description given by Asaph of the revelation which he had received in *the great sanctuary of God*,

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concerning *the future* of the lawless rich bearing this debased *image* of God.

And now what does it all mean? Does it merely mean *sudden* death; or does it rather mean *total* death: an utter destruction of personal being? If any elect to say, "Merely sudden death"; may we not turn upon them with the question, how mere sudden death meets the case? Suppose we could (as we cannot, for want of evidence) accept it as an observed fact, that such presumptuous men do uniformly die sudden deaths; how would that alone solve this mystery of providence? Is there, after all, any such broad distinction to be drawn between slow death and sudden death? What does it signify so much, whether a man is struck down in a moment, or whether he slowly wastes and wears away? It is not at all plain that there is anything material in the difference. Besides, it may with confidence be affirmed, that this is not the direction in which the text points. Certainly, suddenness is there—at least relative suddenness (*in a moment*). But the point emphasized by the accumulated terms of the passage is rather the completeness of the destruction, than the suddenness of the death. Indeed, it looks as though the word "death" had been carefully avoided; but while the common word "death" is avoided, the word *terrors* is emphatically brought in, and some scope must naturally be given in which those terrors may be supposed to effect the terrible overthrow intended: an overthrow so terrible and complete that before the psalm is ended, it is termed both a *perishing* and an *extermination*. In fine, the impression made by the whole passage is, that it is not what is understood as an ordinary sudden death that is meant; but an awful infliction of the utter destruction of the whole being by some unendurable manifestation of Divine wrath: as a Christian, availing himself of New Testament language, might say,—the first and second deaths being blended in one, and the terrors including the wrath of the Lamb (Rev. 6:16, 17). These may be regarded as here foreshortened for the practical purpose of summary statement, and because the then current knowledge of the future could not bear the introduction of details. Reverting to what the O.T. itself does teach, we may usefully remind ourselves of that great passage in Isaiah (57:16) which plainly intimates that there is possible such a protracted manifestation of Divine anger, as no man could sustain; and though, there, the intention seems to be, to let in a hope of mercy, yet here the intention is equally visible of excluding such hope.

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Of course, if death were ordinarily to be taken as equivalent to total extinction of personal being, all this would amount to nothing; and our exposition would have to remain unfinished. But, assuredly, we may, with the general consent of Bible readers, dismiss that devastating conception of death as extravagantly unwarrantable; and therefore may reaffirm our present contention that the utter desolation and final extinction of personal being is the true meaning of this passage: first, because it completely fills up the terms employed, and, second, because it solves the providential mystery it was given to explain. After such a revelation, who dare pray to be rich, who can desire to be set in such slippery places? The temptation is gone; and therefore it follows that the answer is complete. In further confirmation of all which, as thus far advanced, suffice it to call attention to the broad, fundamental harmony which this exposition of the Psalms unfolds. In the first of this series of psalms, 37, 49, 73, it was submitted that for the righteous man *there is a future*: for transgressors there is *not*! The confident assurance of the truth of that conclusion has helped us so far through this psalm and nothing else could. That conclusion stands as an immovable principle. Details are yet needed, but some particulars are already being supplied. Here we see not only the principle confirmed; but the detailed and penetrating lesson taught, that *even in this life the Divine image may be so defaced and caricatured as to become an offence to the Almighty and ripe for destruction, as a consequence of unknown terrors!*

In at length advancing to Stanza VI. of this psalm (vers. 21-22), we have to express immeasurable obligation to Delitzsch for suggesting and defending the hypothetic colouring thrown upon it. How disconcerting it would have been to find the psalmist still floundering in (or, if not floundering in, at least lingering over) the doubts, from which the vision in the great sanctuary was given to deliver him! How delightful, by contrast and by helpfulness onward, to perceive that he is now merely shaming his former doubts into perpetual silence. "How unmanly!" he is now heard saying, "to cherish such feelings any longer! How unworthy of the name of a *man*, to harbour such thoughts any more!" He had modestly assumed to be a *thinker*, before he could find opportunity to go into the great sanctuary of God. But now that he has been thither—or is still perhaps remaining there, since his address to God is as yet unbroken—he thinks again, and to some purpose; and his thought is, what

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“a colossus of stupidity” he would be, not now to be satisfied: “I, a man, who can converse with thee, and receive such counsel as thou hast now been giving me!” Furthermore, this merely hypothetic repetition of the old temptation enables us to advance at once, at the close of this stanza, to the natural rendering of the preposition (*with thee*—Gk. rough breathing *'immaka*) which has to do such important service in the very next line, namely the first of Stanza VII. The old doubt only hypothetically put, enables us to anticipate by saying “with thee,” here at the close of ver. 22: “Being, as I am, *with thee*, how stupid such a doubt would now appear.” And then he can follow on in ver. 23 by saying, *And yet I am continually with thee* (*'immaka*). In contrast with the smoothness of which, how awkward and even suspicious to have to render the same preposition first “before thee” (ver. 22) and then “with thee” (ver. 23). We are thus particular down to a particle, because of the extreme value of Delitzsch’s hypothetical translation of vers. 21 and 22: which, thus defended, may now be dismissed.

Stanza VII. thus at once bears us along into the midstream of near fellowship with God and of consequent victorious confidence in Him. “*Thou hast grasped my right hand*, by thus disclosing to me that which for ever shames into silence my doubts. *By Thy counsel wilt thou* (continue to do as thou hast now done) *guide me*, *And afterwards* (leaving us easily to supply the thought, ‘after life’s journey’) *gloriously take me.*” He knows not precisely *how* it will be done, but *glorious in the manner of it* will it assuredly be; and the decisive *act* done, he says, will be to *take me*, even as Enoch was taken to be with God; or, as Ps. 49:15—if just sung in “the great sanctuary”—may have suggested, “*wilt take me* (out of the hand of hades, whether by transformation preventing death, or by resurrection reversing death)” The point of this revelation clearly cannot lie in details, which are confessedly not supplied; but in the broad and simple fact announced, of being *taken* by God. Obviously all turns on the character of him who takes. He who, as an enemy whom I hate, captures me, makes of me a slave, and excites my utmost fears; but he who, as a friend whom I admire and love, captures me, at the same time enraptures me, delights me, and excites my highest hopes. All, then, here turns on the character of God, and of his relation to me. And of this, the next stanza sings.

In language of extreme simplicity and brevity—like the

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lispings of a babe that has not yet learned to speak—and yet of extreme beauty, because everything is suggested that is not expressed, the psalmist (Stanza VII.) says, *Who—for me—in the heavens? And—with thee: having thee—*(whether there or here) *I have no delight on the earth* (where are, or have been, all I have known and loved). Of course, the language is comparative, even while it shrinks from comparison; but the one clear thing which it reveals is the delight in his God now felt, as never before, by this pure-hearted Israelite. It is on the tide of this delight in God himself that he is carried over into the unknown, and is moved to express a conception to convey which no exact words had yet been coined; and the approximate words to express which amount to a contradiction in terms: *When have failed my flesh and my heart—*(in other words, my body and my mind)—*the rock of my heart and my portion* (then and on and ever) *is God age-abidingly*. The mind that rests on that rock cannot sink. The essential Ego will somehow survive the wreck; if it have nothing else in which to inhere, it will inhere in God, or else a sorry *portion* would he be! But, indeed, we have gone too far, in saying that for this conception no language had yet been coined—although, it is true, Asaph may not have been familiar with it: “Into thy hands I commit my spirit” (31:5) probably is a prayer which exactly meets the case, and at all events was honoured by being used by Jesus and by his first martyr Stephen. Nevertheless, in any case, love finds out how to make itself understood; and absolute triumph over death is here radiant as the rising sun. Perfect love to a perfect God gives the victory: the nearest possible *approach* to that God (Stanza IX.) constitutes the highest attainable *blessedness*, and must ever prompt the most joyful *songs of Zion* whether earthly or heavenly.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Read verse one and discuss whether or not the conclusion to the problem is here stated.
2. There are several Psalms which discuss the problem of the prosperity of the wicked. (Cf. Ps. 27 and 49) If it was solved before, why raise the issue again? Are there different facets of the problem in each Psalm? Discuss.
3. If all we know about heaven was that which is contained in the Old Testament, how easy would it be for us to endure the arrogant prosperity of the wicked? Discuss.

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4. Into which "sanctuary" did the Psalmist go? Into what sanctuary can we go? Is the church building a sanctuary? Is there a better one?
5. Please be honest with yourself and give a personal answer to the several questions asked in the text: (1) "Does God realize what is going on?"; (2) "Have I been wasting my time?"; (3) "Why take the trouble to be pure?"; (4) "Whom have I in heaven but You?"; (5) "Whom do I desire on earth but Thee?"
6. A large part of the problem is in what others will see and say about the believer—Discuss.
7. Is the problem of this Psalm larger in America or in Asia or Africa or Europe? Discuss.

PSALM 74

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

Ruthless Injuries to the Sanctuary and Oppression in the Land
by an Enemy, call forth Expostulation with God
for his quiescence.

ANALYSIS

Stanza I., vers. 1-3a, In Expostulation for Present Rejection, the Psalmist Reminds God how he had Acquired, Redeemed, and Exalted His Inheritance. Stanza II., vers. 3b-7, Profanation of the Sanctuary Described. Stanza III., vers. 8, 9, Extent of the Desolation. Stanza IV., vers 10, 11, Renewed Expostulation with God. Stanzas V., VI., VII., vers, 12, 13; 14, 15; 16, 17, Divine Activities Aforetime in History and in Creation. Stanzas VIII., IX., X., vers. 18, 19; 20, 21; 22, 23, Earnest Pleadings for Divine Interposition.

(Lm.) An Instructive Psalm—By Asaph.

- 1 Wherefore O God hast thou cast off utterly?
wherefore smoketh thine anger against the flock of thy
shepherding?
- 2 Remember thy congregation (which) thou acquiredst
aforetime?
(which) thou redeemest to be the tribe of thine
inheritance,—
Mount Zion wherein thou didst make thy habitation,