

## **A Crisis in Faith: An Exegesis of Psalm 73**

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### Introduction

Psalm 73 is a striking witness to the vitality of the individual life of faith in Israel. It represents the struggles through which the Old Testament faith had to pass. The psalm, a powerful testimony to a battle that is fought within one's soul, reminds one of the book of Job.<sup>1</sup> Experiencing serious threat to his assurance of God in a desperate struggle with the Jewish doctrine of retribution, the poet of Psalm 73 raised the question, "How is Yahweh's help to and blessing of those who are loyal to him realized in face of the prosperity of the godless?"<sup>2</sup> His consolation is the fact that God holds fast to the righteous one and "remains his God in every situation in life," and even death cannot remove the communion between them.<sup>3</sup> He finds a "solution" not in a new or revised interpretation of the old retribution doctrine, but in a "more profound vision of that in which human life is truly grounded, and from which it derives its value."<sup>4</sup> But Weiser argues, and rightly so, that what is at stake here is more than a mere theological or intellectual problem; it is a matter of life or death—the question of the survival of faith generally.<sup>5</sup> The poem represents an

1. A. Weiser, *The Psalms*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), p. 507; cf. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, Vol. 2, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967), p. 259.

2. Eichrodt, *op. cit.*, p. 520; von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* Vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1962), p. 406.

3. von Rad, *op. cit.*, p. 406; but cf. Dahood, *Psalms 51-100*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1968), p. 187.

4. Eichrodt, *op. cit.*, p. 521.

5. Weiser, *op. cit.*, p. 507.

inquiry into the nature of man's communion with God, and the problem of suffering is really only the occasion of departure for this. The psalm is a confession revealing a man's struggle for a living communion with his God, a struggle that presents a crisis for his faith.<sup>6</sup>

In order to properly interpret this psalm, several form-critical matters must be considered.

1. Structure. Psalm 73 may be outlined as follows, on the basis of content.<sup>7</sup>

1-2—the problem

3-12—the offence at the prosperity of the wicked

13-16—the poet's own calamity and doubts

17-26—everything seen in a new light in regards to the wicked (17-22) and God (23-26)

27-28—conclusion

2. *Classification, Setting in Life, Purpose.* Scholarship is divided over the type (*Gattung*) of Psalm 73. Gunkei spoke of 'wisdom poetry' (*Weisheitsgedichten*) and placed Psalm 73 in this category.<sup>8</sup> Bentzen agrees with this, since he thinks the whole book may be regarded as a wisdom book created "in order to have an authoritative expression of Israel's religion."<sup>9</sup> This would mean that it has been transferred to another "place in life" than that of most of its single small units. It is a book to be read for edification. The Sages have taken it over from the cultic life; "from the temple it has been transferred to the school."<sup>10</sup>

Eissfeldt includes it among genuine wisdom poems but argues that, while they were used in the cultus, they actually were derived from the circles of the wise (*hakhamim*). They go beyond the form of the

6. *Ibid.*

7. Suggested by Weiser, *op. cit.*, p. 508; cf. Donald Macleod, "Faith beyond the Forms of Faith: An Exposition of Psalm 73," *Interpretation*, 12 (October, 1958), 418.

8. Along with Pss. 49, 1, 112, 128, 37. Roland E. Murphy, "A Consideration of the Classification 'Wisdom Psalms,'" *SVT*, 9 (1963), 157.

9. A. Bentzen, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, Vol. 1 (Copenhagen: G. E. C. Gad Co., 1952), pp. 170, 254. He argues that the introductory poem (Ps. 1) seems to be a motto taken from the wisdom school and reveals the admonition of the collectors to the readers: they are invited to choose the right path to glory, study the law, and obey God's word. So the book is not only a ritual song book but a book of wisdom showing the way to a righteous life.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 254.

wisdom saying and make use of the song form for the expression of their feelings, reflections, admonitions, etc.<sup>11</sup>

Oesterley, Leslie, and Dahood argue that Psalm 73 has a didactic purpose and belongs among the "wisdom psalms."<sup>12</sup> This is supported by the wisdom trends that are prominent in this psalm, viz., contrast of 'wicked' and 'righteous,' preoccupation with the problem of retribution, practical advice in regards to conduct (diligence, responsibility, etc.).<sup>13</sup>

Murphy argues that Psalm 73 fails to qualify as a wisdom psalm on the basis of style and characteristics. While its content is a wisdom theme, its literary style resembles a thanksgiving song. It begins with a proposition that explains the poet's grateful prayer.<sup>14</sup>

Mowinckel considers it a psalm of thanksgiving which has arisen out of the author's visit to the sanctuary where he submitted himself to the usual purification rites for sickness and where he was miraculously healed and spiritually refreshed.<sup>15</sup>

Buttenweiser says the psalm is an epitome of the drama. It is a lyric, not a didactic poem, and so presents the problem by the same indirect method of description as the drama does.<sup>16</sup>

It must be admitted that there are some features of several psalm classifications in Psalm 73. This would especially be true if the psalms

11. Along with 1, 37, 49, 78, 91, 112, 128, 133. He says 105, 106, 90, 139 contain "wisdom" thoughts, but since they also have hymnic features they are reckoned as hymns. Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965), p. 124; cf. pp. 126, 127, 86.

12. W. O. E. Oesterley, *The Psalms* (London: S. P. C. K., 1955), p. 341; E. A. Leslie, *The Psalms* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1949), p. 411. He says they would be rendered in the temple service of postexilic Judaism where instruction in the good life was common. "The most appropriate setting for them would be in connection with the great pilgrimage festivals, and more particularly the (Festival of Tabernacles and the New Year," p. 412. Dahood, *op. cit.*, p. 187, says the Psalmist addresses the religious assembly.

13. Cf. Murphy's brief survey, *op. cit.*, p. 160, as well as the works of scholars cited there.

14. Murphy, *op. cit.*, p. 164. He assigns 1, 32, 34, 49, 112, 128 to the *Weisheitsgedichten*, p. 160.

15. *Psalmstudien*, I, pp. 127, 128; cited by W. Stewart McCullough, "The Book of Psalms," *The Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1955), p. 386.

16. Moses Buttenweiser, *Psalms* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1938), p. 526.

did derive from a wisdom source and were adapted to the cult, or vice versa.

Westermann says Psalm 73 (along with 130,123) represents a transition from an individual lament: to a psalm of confidence.<sup>17</sup> McCullough admits a possible double classification for Psalm 73 and argues that it is clearly a psalm of trust, but he says it also contains some of the issues which exercised the minds of the more reflective, so that it could be a didactic or wisdom psalm.<sup>18</sup> Barth classifies the psalm as an individual lament "characterized by the appearance of the individual simply as the wise, pious, and righteous man," which at one moment appears to contain words spoken by one man to another and then in a moment becomes a prayer to God.<sup>19</sup> Buss argues that Psalm 73 is a wisdom psalm with a strong personal note which might have been composed for the singer's own presentation rather than for general use by the laity.<sup>20</sup> This personal note has also impressed Fohrer, who regards the psalm as a personal statement (as Ps. 51). Psalm 73 might be a thanksgiving song that is practically a didactic poem. Since the worshipper seeks to express his thanksgiving by attempting to bring others to the same experience, he has penetrated the psalm with forms

17. Claus Westermann, *The Praise of God in the Psalms* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1961), p. 80. Westermann argues that a change in speaker takes place in many psalms. The moment of change may be indicated by a "now," "but now," "nevertheless" (cf. Pss. 27:6; 12:5; 20:6), or the change may not be so obvious. Usually at the place where the change occurs, the psalm contains a 'waw' adversative (cf. 55:16; 22:3; 102:12; 13:5; 31:14, 26, 27; 86:15; etc.), pp. 70, 71. These clauses indicate a transition from lamentation to another mode of speech (either confession of trust or assurance of being heard), and the transition occurs in a happening between God and man. These transitions are not schematically bound to any particular place in the psalm itself, pp. 7-72; cf. table on pp. 66-69. Praise of God and confession of trust are very intimately related to each other in clauses with "but," p. 74.

18. McCullough, *op. cit.*, p. 386.

19. C. Barth, *Introduction to the Psalms* (New York: Charles Scribners, 1966), p. 18.

20. He suggests that it might reflect the tension between Zadokites and poorer Levites and in any case has affinity with the complaints of Jeremiah and Habakkuk. Martin J. Buss, "The Psalms of Asaph and Korah," *JBL*, 82 (December, 1963), 383, 386.

of wisdom instruction.<sup>21</sup> But, Fohrer adds, wisdom poetry and didactic poetry must be considered forms of wisdom instruction rather than a psalm type.<sup>22</sup>

Of the 150 psalms, 140 were composed and used for cultic purposes. A problem arises, then, when one finds some poems which do not seem to have been composed for this reason.<sup>23</sup>

Mowinckel argues that this suggests a learned psalmography which derived, not from temple singers, but from private men of wisdom with no direct relation to the cult.<sup>24</sup> These psalms have wisdom subjects, are didactic, and have the form of a proverb or wise saying. They are most prominent in psalms dealing with suffering and justice, and especially in thanksgiving psalms. Psalm 73 belongs to this group.<sup>25</sup>

However, the psalm writer may use the form of wisdom poetry for his personal expression of the praise of God, or thanksgiving of a blessing received, without his psalm actually being a wisdom poem.<sup>26</sup>

Psalm 73 is a thanksgiving psalm but with so much personal experience and departures from and variations with psalm patterns that one wonders whether it was composed by and for the individual or for use on cultic occasions.<sup>27</sup> Mowinckel argues that it was common among the righteous to compose, after their salvation, a thanksgiving psalm which was to be recited at the sacrificial feast. It would be both a natural expression of their feelings and evidence of piety to honor Yahweh in such a way.<sup>28</sup>

21. Georg Fohrer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1968), p. 269. Cf. von Rad, *op. cit.*, p. 406, where he says Ps. 73 (and 49) is not just a psalm of lament or thanksgiving for it contains no description of actual need, etc. Pss. 73 and 49 "are rather pervaded by a strong striving after a principle which does not stop short at a single calamity, but presses forward to the basis of the problem."

22. *Ibid.*, p. 262:

23. Sigmund Mowinckel, "Psalms and Wisdom," *SVT*, 3 (1955), 205.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 211.

25. *Ibid.*

26. Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, Vol. I (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967), p. 31.

27. "The psalms of protection and thanksgiving have at times moved so far away from their particular style type that it has been suggested that we ought to separate some of them into a special group of 'psalms of confidence.' To these belong some of the highest ranking ones, regarded from both the religious and the poetic aspect, in the whole collection; for instance Pss. 23; 73; 103," *ibid.*, p. 132. Cf. Mowinckel, "Psalms and Wisdom," p. 211.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 110.

There is evidence for a custom of writing a thanksgiving psalm on leather or a votive stela and placing it in the temple "before Yahweh."<sup>29</sup> So Psalm 73 (along with 34, 43, 37) may have been deposited as a votive and memorial gift to Yahweh and on a later occasion included by temple singers and poets in the treasury of psalms. This might explain how some of them may have come to be used ritually in the cult.<sup>30</sup> Yet it must be pointed out, with Mowinckel, that the personal element does not exclude the possibility that temple personnel composed it. Like everyone else, they could experience suffering and hardship.<sup>31</sup>

3. *Date*. Psalms dealing with human life in general go back to the monarchical period, and retribution dogma could begin as early as Jeremiah's time (cf. 12:1-3).<sup>32</sup> The poem could very-well be placed in the exilic period of Jeremiah's day, perhaps 598-587 B.C.<sup>33</sup> Mowinckel and Oesterley argue for a comparatively late date on the basis of language and theological attitude.<sup>34</sup>

4. *Superscription*. Psalm 73 bears the ascription *mizmor l'asaph*. *Mizmor* (*psalmos* in the LXX) has something of the meaning "to pluck." It has come to be used of the plucking of stringed instruments (which is also the case with *psalmos*). A *mizmor*, then, is a song which is sung to a stringed instrument.<sup>35</sup>

'Asaph' may be the father or ancestor of Joah, King Hezekiah's recorder (2 Kings 18:18, 37; Isa. 36:3, 22) or the ancestor or founder of one of the three chief families of guilds of Levite temple musicians known as the "sons of Asaph" (1 Chron. 25:1, 2, 6, 9). According to

29. Found in Syrian and Egyptian practices; cited on p. 41, *ibid*.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 114.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 142; Mowinckel gives no explanation for the inclusion of Ps. 73 in the Asaphite collection, unless that ascription indicates collectors.

32. Fleming James, *Thirty Psalmists* (New York: Seabury Press, 1965), p. 189, but he admits that Ps. 73 could be a late psalm coming from a period when faith in a blessed hereafter was emerging in some Judaistic circles; cf. S. R. Driver, *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1913), p. 385. 1

33. Cf. McCullough, *op. cit.*, p. 386.

34. Oesterley, *op. cit.*, p. 341; Mowinckel, *op. cit.*, p. 95. The collectors of the psalm could have been active at either suggested date, as well as the enemies depicted in the psalm. Scholars seem evenly divided on the issue.

35. N. H. Snaith, *The Psalms: A Short Introduction* (London: Epworth Press, 1945), p. 31. Snaith adds that E. G. Hirsch says the meaning is 'paragraph' and indicates a new beginning. But this explanation is not generally accepted.

the Chronicler, Asaph was a Gershonite Levite, who, along with Heman and Jeduthan (Ethan), was given charge by David of the song service in the tabernacle (1Chron. 6:39). While full information is lacking, most likely he was a contemporary of David.<sup>36</sup> The Chronicler's history has the "sons of Asaph" participating in nearly every major temple celebration before and after the Exile. They are occasionally represented as cymbalists, but mostly as singers (1 Chron. 15:17, 19; 16:5, 7, 37; 2 Chron. 5:12; 29:13; 35:15; Ezra 3:10; Neh. 12:35).<sup>37</sup>

The Asaph superscriptions probably indicate a tradition of his authorship of the psalms, a style peculiar to them which was originated by him, or perhaps simply a reference to the Asaphite guild.<sup>38</sup> The name is always introduced with the particle / (*lamedh*) which may mean "by," "for," or "concerning." Ugaritic literature uses / before the name of a hero in a poem (as Ba'al or Aqhat) rather than the author. This could be the case in the psalms, but the view that it denotes the compiler or performing guild cannot be abandoned, for this was chiefly the way composition took place.<sup>39</sup>

Twelve psalms are attributed to Asaph (50, 73-83). These psalms have certain characteristics:

- 1) Psalms 73-83 use 'Elohim' 36 times (compared to 13 times for 'Jehovah').<sup>40</sup>
- 2) God is Judge (50, 73, 78, 81).
- 3) God is frequently introduced as the speaker (50, 75, 81, 82).
- 4) God is shepherd to his flock (74:1, 77:20; 78:52, etc.).

36. B. T. Dahlberg, "Asaph," *IDB*, Vol. 1 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), p. 244.

37. I Esdras 1:15 calls them temple singers; *ibid.*, p. 245. The guild is also prominent in postexilic name lists (1 Chron. 9:15; Ezra 2:41; Neh. 7:44; 11:17, 22).

38. *Ibid.*; cf. Dahood, *op. cit.*, p. 188.

39. Eissfeldt, *op. cit.*, pp. 451-453; cf. S. R. Driver, *op. cit.*, p. 381, and Kirkpatrick, *op. cit.*, p. 428, the latter adding that David's chief musician could not have written all the psalms attributed to him since some of them are clearly exilic or later. The New English Bible omits all of the psalm headings, regarding them as "almost certainly not original." Cf. "Introduction to the Old Testament" by G. R. Driver in the NEB (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. xviii.

40. But S. R. Driver, *op. cit.*, pp. 371, 372, argues that this is not due to a preference for that name by the authors. "It must be due to the fact that they have passed through the hands of a compiler who changed 'Jehovah' of the original authors into 'Elohim' . . . because . . . at the time when this compiler lived there was a current preference for the latter name."

5) There is didactic use of history (74:12ff.; 77:10ff.; 80:8ff.; etc.).<sup>41</sup>

6) The singer uses personal expressions in relation to the sanctuary (42/43; 73:84).

7) There are communal laments of personal expression.<sup>42</sup>

Most scholars agree that at one time all the Asaph psalms were together. There seems to be much to favor the proposed original order as 1-41; 51-72; 42-49; 50, 73-83; 84-150.<sup>43</sup>

### 5. *Exegesis.*

Truly God is good to the upright,  
to those who are pure in heart. (RSV)

The particle *'ak* combines an affirmative and restrictive, or even an adversative, and has something of an element of contradiction in it. It is used when the writer deliberately intends to deny some proposition and expresses the idea "Nay, but after all."<sup>44</sup> Here it means, "Nay, in spite of all that people say, and in spite of all that I have seen, I still do earnestly maintain that God is good to the upright man."<sup>45</sup>

*l'yisra'el* presents some translation problems. *l'* could be the vocative participle. Israel is preceded by the vocative in 81:5 and 122:4b. The vocative *l'* in Ugaritic is particularly frequent with personal names, and its presence here "enhances the likelihood that this is the particle preceding personified Israel."<sup>46</sup> This translation would reveal the *Sitz im Leben*: The psalmist is addressing a religious assembly of Israelites.<sup>47</sup>

41. A. F. Kirkpatrick, *The Book of Psalms*, The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge University Press, 1951), p. 429.

42. Buss, *op. cit.*, p. 383.

43. Snaith, *op. cit.*, p. 9; S. R. Driver, *op. cit.*, p. 367; and Kirkpatrick, *op. cit.*, p. 427. The latter says Ps. 50 probably is in its present position due to a similarity of subject matter with 49 and 51, intentionally placed there for this reason by the compiler.

44. Cf. Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Psalms*, Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: William Eerdmans Company, 1949), p. 311; Kirkpatrick, *op. cit.*, p. 432; N. Snaith, *Hymns of the Temple* (London: SCM Press, 1951), p. 102.

45. Snaith, *Hymns*, p.102.

46. Dahood, *op. cit.*, p. 188; Vocative *lamedh* occurs frequently in Ugaritic myths with divine names: "0 Baal," "0 El," etc. Dahood argues for its occurrence in Pss. 3:7; 16:1; 31:1; 92:1; 73:1; 81:5; 122:4; "Vocative 'Lamedh' in the Psalter," *Vetus Testamentum*, 16 (July, 1966), 299-311.

47. Dahood, *Psalms*, p. 188. Delitzsch says "Israel" is to be understood (as in Gal. 6:16) as those who have put away all impurity and uncleanness from their lives and strive after sanctification, p. 311.

Scholars generally agree that it is better to divide *l'elis'rael* into two words, *Layyaar* and *'el*, giving the translation "Truly God is good to the upright."<sup>48</sup> This enables the word *'elohim* to be transferred to the second line of the couplet, improving the rhythm and sense. It produces a true, elegant couplet and the verse agrees with the rest of the psalm where the psalmist discusses, not God's goodness to Israel, but God's attitude to the upright man within Israel. So the verse should read:

Nay:  
 Good to the upright (is) El,  
 God (is good) to the pure of heart.<sup>49</sup>

*l'bbabhe lebhabh* describes the man who loves good and despises evil; it is the condition of admission to God's presence.<sup>50</sup> The psalmist is thus reassuring his audience of the unmistakable goodness of God toward the righteous man. This is the conclusion to which the whole struggle, depicted in verses 3-26, has brought him, and like in many of the psalms, he begins with this comprehensive evaluation.<sup>51</sup>

vs. 2:  
 But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled,  
 my steps had well nigh slipped.

*suppekah* ('were nearly gone') reads literally "poured out,"<sup>52</sup> or as unstable as water." The slipping of the foot is a metaphor to denote

48. A. R. Huist, *Old Testament Translation Problems* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1960), p. 108. So read RSV and NEB.

49. Snaith, *Hymns*, pp. 102, 103; Edward J. Kissane, *The Book of Psalms*, Vol. 2 (Dublin: Browne and Noland, 1954), p. 5, says it is more probable that the first word for God ('el) is due to dittography and that the parallel to 'upright' has been dropped. But this seems most unlikely, as is Briggs' suggestion that vs. 1 is simply an introductory liturgical gloss which generalizes the psalm and makes it applicable to Israel as a people, ICC, Vol. 2 (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1907), p. 142.

50. McCullough, *op. cit.*, p. 387; Kirkpatrick, *op. cit.*, p. 432; cf. Ps. 24:14f. and Matt. 5:8.

51. Cf. Dahood, *op. cit.*, p. 188; Leslie, *op. cit.*, p. 419; and Pss. 23, 121.

52. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), p. 1049. Briggs says *wa'ani* was added by a glossator, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

53. Dahood, *op. cit.*, p. 188. He says the *pual* vocalization '*suppekah*' can scarcely be correct since this frequent root nowhere exhibits a *piel* form. He suggests that it be pointed as *qal* passive, a conjugation unknown to the Massoretes. The ending represents the archaic 3rd pers. fem. dual ending.

calamity or even loss of faith.<sup>54</sup> The psalmist confesses that he had almost given up his faith. Verses 3-12 show how it was possible to arrive at such a state of mind.<sup>55</sup>

vs. 3:

For I was envious of the arrogant,  
when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

*Hilel* as a participle indicates "boastful ones, boasters."<sup>56</sup> Dahood thinks this term refers to pagan Canaanites.<sup>57</sup> The terms 'righteous' and 'wicked' (*r<sup>e</sup>sha'im*) have often been taken to indicate two "parties" among the Jews, the righteous being obedient to the law, and the wicked being the ungodly or worldly-minded. But as a rule, the terms point to national antagonists (Gentiles). The *resha'im* in the psalms do not signify any group of men, but all those who act as enemies of the worshipper. They could be national enemies of the worshipper. They could be national enemies or treacherous countrymen, but usually they are national enemies of Israel or "the 'heathen' oppressors and their helpers within Israel."<sup>58</sup> In Psalm 73 they may refer to pagan overlords or even fellow apostate Jews.<sup>59</sup>

So the psalmist's distress is made even more bitter because of the resentment he has at seeing the ungodly prosper while the righteous are plagued. He has come to doubt any sense of righteousness in God's sovereignty of the world and even any use in trying to live a godly life.<sup>60</sup>

54. A. R. Johnson, *The Vitality of the Individual in the Thought of Ancient Israel* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1964), p. 67n; cf. Deut. 32:35; Job 12:5; Pss. 38:16; 56:13; 66:9; 94:18; 116:8; 121:3; Jer. 13:16.

55. Weiser, *op. cit.*, p. 308; Dahood, *op. cit.*, p. 188.

56. Brown, Driver, Briggs, p. 238. Hereafter cited as BDB.

57. Dahood, *op. cit.*, p. 188.,

58. Mowinckel, *op. cit.*, pp. 207, 208. This is especially evident in Ps. 125. In Ps. 58 the wicked are "estranged from the womb", i.e., they stand outside the fellowship of the covenant. The evildoers are then Gentile enemies and oppressors of Israel. Cf. also J. Pedersen, *Israel: Its Life and Culture* (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), p. 446, who says they are not necessarily a homogeneous party or certain order of society. In Pss. 35, 55, 109 they are former friends who proved faithless. In different psalms, the enemies are different.

59. Mowinckel, Vol. 2, p. 36.

60. Mowinckel also regards the "I" of these and the following verses a case in which the psalmist identifies with the worshipper in his sorrow and joy. ". . . he reaches the height of his artistic ability when he feels that now it is the soul of Israel and that of the typical Israelite that vibrates in his lamentation or his praise," *ibid.*, p. 140.

vs. 4:  
 For they have no pangs;  
                   their bodies are sound and sleek.

The Masoretic text reads *l'motam* ('in their death'). But this does not fit the context. The RSV and NEB have made two words out of *l'motam*; *lamo* (parallel form of *lahem*), "to them," which is read with the first half of the verse, and *tam*, "sound" or "whole," which is taken with the second strophe. The RSV reads as above and the NEB reads "No pain, no suffering is theirs; they are sleek and sound in limb."<sup>61</sup>

vss. 5-7:  
 They are not in trouble as other men are;  
                   they are not stricken like other men.  
 Therefore pride is their necklace;  
                   violence covers them as a garment.  
 Their eyes swell out with fatness,  
                   their hearts overflow with follies.

*'im* ("like") has a closely related meaning in the Ras Shamra texts.<sup>62</sup> They are not smitten like some men, so they strut around in arrogance, displaying their pride as if it were a necklace.<sup>63</sup>

According to the MT, the first line of verse 7 describes the insolent look of the sleek-faced enemies. But the LXX and Syriac represent a different reading which, according to Kirkpatrick, Snaith, and Bittenweiser, suits the probable sense of the next line better and gets rid of a grammatical anomaly. So Kirkpatrick reads: "Their iniquity comes forth from the heart: the imaginations of their mind overflow."<sup>64</sup>

61. Hulst, *op. cit.*, p. 108. Cf. Snaith, *Hymns*, p. 104, and Dahood, *op. cit.*, p. 189. Delitzsch proposes to omit *l'motam* and suggests the reading "they have no pangs, vigorous and well-nourished is their body." (p. 312).

62. Dahood, *op. cit.*, p. 180; BDB, p. 767.

63. BDB, p. 742; Chains were worn on the neck by men and women in Eastern countries for ornament and badges of office (Gen. 41:42; Dan. 5:7). Kirkpatrick, *op. cit.*, p. 433. Dahood says *'anaq* is a denominative verb form from *'anaq'* (neck) and the Ugaritic *'nq'*, *op. cit.*, p. 189. Cf. Snaith, *Hymns*, p. 104; Weiser, *op. cit.*, p. 509.

64. Kirkpatrick, *op. cit.*, p. 433; Cf. Snaith, *Hymns*; p. 104 and Bittenweiser, *op. cit.*, p. 532.

The RSV and NEB seem to preserve the parallelism best with their adherence to the MT. Dahood reprints *mehalab* ("fat") to compare with Genesis 48:12 and reads "than milk."<sup>65</sup> But this is not necessary, for fat or the midriff of the human body is used of the grossness of the wicked in Job 15:27 and is figurative of an unreceptive heart (17:10; 119:70).<sup>66</sup> *lebab* requires no possessive suffix because it is a part of the body or because it balances the suffixed '*enemo*.'<sup>67</sup> The idea, then, is that their gaze is greedy, and vain thoughts pass through their minds.

vs. 8:

They scoff and speak with malice;  
loftily they threaten oppression.

*y<sup>e</sup>dabberu* ("speak against") occurs again in 75:5.<sup>68</sup> Dahood suggests that *bera'* be read as "Evil One" and, in parallel to 75:5, be interpreted as a reference to God, who in the minds of the unbelievers is the cause of evil upon the earth and hence the evil one. Then *mimmarom* is taken as parallel to *b<sup>e</sup>ra'* and rendered "Exalted," being a divine appellation. Since oppression comes from on high, the scoffers protest against heaven.<sup>69</sup> This is possible, but the psalmist's protest seemingly indicates that the people suffer from this talk as well.<sup>70</sup>

vs. 9.

They have set their mouths against the heavens,  
and their tongues strut through the earth.

"Heaven" could mean God, and "earth" could refer to man and institutions, if these phrases were to be separated. But the words seem to form a single idea (as they do in Gen. 1:1; Job 20:27).<sup>71</sup>

In several prophetic and poetic lines, "heaven" and "earth" indicate the world as a whole, the universe, all the inhabitants of the earth,

65. Dahood, *op. cit.*, p. 189.

66. BDB, p. 316; cf. Ezra 24:16; 20:7.

67. Dahood, *op. cit.*, p. 189.

68. *Ibid.* Gunkel thinks the repetition of *daber* offends the Hebrew style but does not emend the text. Dahood says the Ugaritic exhibits a number of texts employing identical words in parallel cola.

69. *Ibid.*

70. As vs. 9 indicates.

71. D. A. H. deBoer, "The Meaning of Psalm 73:9," *VT*, 18 (1968), 261.

everything on earth or in the sky.<sup>72</sup> Psalm 73:9 is not at variance with the meaning of these texts. The same figure of speech is in mind. "Mouth" and "tongue" can have a metaphorical meaning of "word" or "command."<sup>73</sup> The poet, then, is not speaking of blasphemy, but of mighty words coming from speakers who know how to enforce obedience far and wide. He points not to their behavior toward God, but toward men: they are arrogant, proud, violent, oppressing, dictating. The poet doubts because they prosper in spite of this.<sup>74</sup>

*Tihalak* frequently means "to go," "proceed," "move" (in a territory). So the phrase would read "the commanding tongue of the wicked is proceeding over the earth," with the idea that nowhere does there seem to be a limit to their strength; the power of the wicked appears to be established.<sup>75</sup>

vs. 10.

Therefore the people turn and praise them;  
and find no fault in them.

This is a difficult verse, almost unintelligible, and emendations are mostly conjectural.<sup>76</sup> The RSV margin reads "abundant waters are drained by them." This reading understands *yimmasu* as a form of the verb *masas* ("sip") and translates *lamo* "by them." The rendering "and abundant waters are found for them" takes *yimmasu* as a form of *masa* ("to find"). But in neither case does the verse take on meaning. The RSV translation "and find no fault in them" rests upon a modified Hebrew text in which consonants are rearranged to form other words.<sup>77</sup> The Ugaritic 'mss' ("to suck") may be a kindred word. So if

72. Cf. Isa. 13:13; 51:6; Jer. 4:28; Joel 2:10; Pss. 57:6; 108:6; deBoer, *op. cit.*, p. 262. Dahood, *op. cit.*, p. 190, notes a connection between 'eres: and Ugaritic 'ars' which denotes a region beneath the sea, and between *samayim* and Ugaritic 'smm' (heaven).

73. *Ibid.*

74. Even vs. 11 does not speak of blasphemy, *ibid.*, p. 264.

75. *Ibid.*; cf. BDB, p. 229; Helmer Ringgren, *The Faith of the Psalmists* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), pp. 44, 45, feels vss. 4-9 describe God's enemies as beasts. He says vs. 9 has an almost literal parallel in a Ras Shamra text which states that some mythological beings, who obviously have some connection with chaos and death, put one lip to the sky and the other to the earth and drained the water in abundance.

76. Cf. Snaith, *Hymns*, p. 104.

77. Hulst, *op. cit.*, p. 108; BDB, p. 534.

*yamossu* were read for the MT *yimmasu*, then the text could be saying that, like the mythical monsters, the rich swallow the ocean (speaking metaphorically of greed), leaving nothing for others." Kirkpatrick suggests that the LXX and Syriac may preserve the true reading "my people," so that the psalmist is speaking with sorrow of his deluded countrymen. "Waters of fulness are drained by them" may be a metaphor for the enjoyment of pleasure; or possibly for "imbibing pernicious principles" (cf. Job 15:16).<sup>79</sup>

vs. 11:

And they say, "How can God know?  
Is there knowledge in the Most High?"

The brief quotation "How can God know? Is there knowledge in the Most High?" is from the lips of the wicked.<sup>80</sup> They are not denying the omniscience of God but his practical knowledge or interest in the conduct and welfare of the individual. This reveals the dissolution of man's personal relationship with God.<sup>81</sup>

vs. 12:

Behold, these are the wicked;  
always at ease, they increase in riches.

These words are the psalmist's, not those of the wicked or their followers, as in verse 11. The form of the sentence, *hineh* ("behold"), indicates a summation.<sup>82</sup> The description is one the psalmist would use for the wicked rather than vice versa (cf. vss. 3-9) The LXX inserts "And I said" at the beginning of the verse, indicating that the Greek

78. Dahood, *op. cit.*, p. 190.

79. Kirkpatrick, *op. cit.*, p. 434; Leslie, *op. cit.*, p. 419. Another problem is the meaning of *halom* ("hither"). Is it an infinitive of the verb *halam* ("to strike") and thus related to the action of Num. 20:7? If so, it is difficult to see how the verse has any relation to the psalm as a whole, Hulst, *op. cit.*, p. 108. Oesterley, *op. cit.*, p. 341, argues that vs. 10 interrupts the connection between vss. 9 and 11 and would follow well after vs. 5. Briggs says the entire verse was probably originally a note of consolation which eventually crept into the text, *op. cit.*, p. 144. It is from Maccabean times and looks to the restoration of God's people to their own land, *ibid.*, p. 142.

80. But one cannot lightly dismiss Kirkpatrick's suggestion that the wicked are not the speakers, but rather they are the deluded mass of their followers of vs. 10, *op. cit.*, p. 434.

81. Weiser, *op. cit.*, p. 510; Briggs, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

82. Kirkpatrick, *op. cit.*, p. 435; cf. Job 5:27; 18:21.

translator thought the psalmist was speaking.<sup>83</sup> The verse continues the description of the good fortune of the wicked.

vss. 13, 14:

All in vain have I kept my heart clean  
and washed my hands in innocence.  
For all the day long I have been stricken,  
and chastened every morning.

*zikithi l<sup>e</sup>bhabhi* and *va'e r<sup>e</sup>has b<sup>e</sup>nigayon kappay* ("pure in heart" and "washed my hands") may be a reference to a ritualistic act: (cf. 26:6; Deut. 21:6,7) but is probably used figuratively here to indicate the psalmist did not sin in thought or deed. Cleanness of hands is a means of denoting one's innocence or positive righteousness.<sup>84</sup> He has kept his palms clean from bribery and violence which the wicked have employed to gain their wealth.<sup>85</sup> If the wicked prosper, then his efforts after holiness have been wasted.<sup>86</sup>

vs. 15:

If I had said, "I will speak thus,"  
I would have been untrue to the generation of thy children.

*bhaghadh<sup>e</sup>ti* ("I would have betrayed") indicates that the psalmist was on the point of renouncing his personal relationship with God. He had considered speaking up and endorsing the thoughts of the wicked, but he refrains lest he should make faith more difficult for God's children.<sup>87</sup> So his loyalty to the community has kept him from going this far. Though at the moment he is no longer able to see God, at least he perceives the fellowship of the believers.<sup>88</sup>

83. *Ibid.*, cf. Dahood, *op. cit.*, p. 191, where he suggests that *salwe 'olam* ("always") may be a divine title. In the Targumic Aramaic *s/* is used of neglecting God. If this is true, the wicked neglect God in their pursuit of riches, and vss. 11, 12 have three names for God: *'el*, *"elyon*, *'olam*.

84. Cf. Job 17:9; 22:30; Pss. 18:24; 24:24; 26:6. Johnson, *op. cit.*, p. 63. BDB, p. 934; Kissane, *op. cit.*, p. 7; McCullough, *op. cit.*, p. 389. Johnson, *op. cit.*, p. 77, says "heart" is used with a force which approximates what we call "mind" or "intellect" (cf. Job 8:10; 12:3; Pss. 77:6; 78:18; 83:5, etc.).

85. Briggs, *op. cit.*, p. 145, but cf. Loren R. Fisher, "An Amarna Age Prodigal" JJS, 3 (1958), 116, who compares this phrase with the symbolic act of "clearing" oneself. Through this action he becomes free and clear of his previous relationship. Cf. Matt. 27:24 and Pilate's action.

86. Cf. Kirkpatrick, *op. cit.*, p. 435.

87. Weiser, *op. cit.*, p. 511; Dahood, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

88. Weiser, *op. cit.*, p.511.

*dor baneka* ("generation of thy sons")<sup>89</sup> is a direct address to God rather than the congregation that is present.<sup>90</sup> *Baneka* ("your sons") refers to the Israelites. "Children" is used in the OT to express Israel's intimate relationship with God.<sup>91</sup>

vs. 16:

But when I thought how to understand this,  
it seemed to me a wearisome task,

*hu'* ("this") refers to the question of why the wicked prosper and the just suffer. *B<sup>e</sup>'enay* means, literally, "for my eyes" and is similar in thought to Ecclesiastes 8:17.<sup>92</sup> The existence of the cult community has been a signpost pointing him to God and keeping him from betrayal.<sup>93</sup>

vs. 17:

until I went into the sanctuary of God;  
then I perceived their end.

*migdese 'el* (God's sanctuary) probably refers to the temple. Maybe during one of the annual festivals, "memories of God's great

89. BDB, *op. cit.*, p. 190; Frank J. Neuberg, "An Unrecognized Meaning of Hebrew *DOR*," *JNES*, 9 (1950) 215-217, admits that the OT usually translates *dbr* as "generation," but he argues that in three Ugaritic passages it means "assembly." He thinks "generation of thy sons" is unlikely since the combination of *dbr baneka* is exactly the same as Ugaritic *dr. bn*. Neuberg feels the meaning of *dbr* as "assembly" must have fallen into disuse at a rather early date. The LXX translators are ignorant of it.

90. Dahood, *op. cit.*, p.191.

91. Cf. Ex. 4:22, 23; Deut. 14:1; Isa. 1:2; McCullough, *op. cit.*, p. 390.

92. Dahood, *op. cit.*, p.192.

93. Weiser, *op. cit.*, p.511.

94. The reference may be to the symbolic representation of God's triumph over the powers of chaos in creation as characterized in the New Year's festival. But it could refer to the dramatizations of the deliverance from Egypt. The psalmist experiences the reality of these redemptive events through the cult and there receives the solution to his problem, Ringgren, *op. cit.*, p. 72. Eichrodt, *op. cit.*, p. 489, says ". . . it is by direct illumination that the poet's eyes are opened to the miracle of true fellowship with God." Weiser, *op. cit.*, p. 511, says this probably refers to an experience in the temple, to an encounter with his God that was brought about by the theophany which took place in the cult of the Covenant Festival.

acts in the past are revived and the psalmist regains his spiritual balance.<sup>95</sup>

*l'aharit* ("final lot")<sup>96</sup> refers to the end of the wicked. He begins to see life and destiny within the context of God's wisdom rather than his own.<sup>97</sup> Life looks different when viewed against the background of judgment and death.<sup>98</sup> He begins to see life more under the aspect of eternity. Appearance is not reality.<sup>99</sup>

vs. 18:

Truly thou dost set them in slippery places;  
thou dost make them fall to ruin.

*wehalaqat* ("slippery places") is in the plural to denote intensity. It is sure to come about. The term itself is figurative and refers to the situation of the wicked.<sup>100</sup>

*l'massu'ot* (from *nasa*, "lift up") probably should read *m<sup>e</sup>sho'oth*.

95. McCullough, *op. cit.*, p. 390. Harris Birkelanc, "The Chief Problem of Psalm 73:17ff.," *ZAW*, 67 (1955), 100f., argues that the sanctuary mentioned is an illegitimate one, the remnant of a pagan sanctuary. He insists that *mo<sup>a</sup>de 'el* (Ps. 74:8) expresses a legitimate sanctuary, while *midq<sup>e</sup>sel 'el* signifies the illegitimate one. When the psalmist came to the remnants of these pagan places that had been destroyed, they demonstrated to him the fate of paganism and pagans: they flourish for a time, but then are demolished by Yahweh. Thus vss. 18, 19 also refer to these sanctuaries rather than to wicked human beings. The devastated sanctuaries have made him realize the uselessness of idols and the eternal value of communion with God. The temple at Jerusalem has not perished, for God protects his people.

BDB, *op. cit.*, p. 874, think *miqdash* refers to "many sacred places in and about the temple." Eichrodt, *op. cit.*, p. 532n, says they are clearly holy places where the profane cannot enter. They are areas of God's dealing with men who seek refuge in him.

Dahood, *op. cit.*, p. 192, says the plural conforms to the frequent Canaanite practice of employing plural forms for names of dwellings. He argues that "sanctuary" refers to heaven and that the psalmist is stating his belief in a blessed existence after death where the glaring inconsistencies of this life will become intelligible.

Pedersen, *op. cit.*, p. 448, says the poet's action is like that of the Babylonian, who after being stricken with evil turns to God in his temple. Briggs regards 17-20 as the addition of a later editor who was not content with the solution given in vss. 21-26, *op. cit.*, pp. 145, 146.

96. BDB, *op. cit.*, p. 31; cf. Deut. 32:20, 29; Jer. 12:4; 31:17.

97. Macleod, *op. cit.*, p. 420.

98. Weiser, *op. cit.*, pp. 511, 512.

99. Leslie, *op. cit.*, p. 420.

100. Snaith, *Hymns*, p. 105; BDB, *op. cit.*, p. 325. Dahood, *op. cit.*, p. 192, prefers "transplant them," reading *tist<sup>e</sup>lemo* as from *satal*; cf. Ps. 1:3.

This would make its root *sho'* ("ruins").<sup>101</sup>

The outward appearance of the life of the wicked is not final. Their security in life is not based on a firm foundation. God has set them in a position in which they are continually exposed to ruin.<sup>102</sup>

vs. 19:

How they are destroyed in a moment,  
swept away utterly by terrors!

*kh<sup>e</sup>ragha'* ("suddenly," "in a moment")<sup>103</sup> actually does not mean that the wicked have fallen down suddenly. They are still strutting about in pride. The use of the perfect tense is idiomatic, describing an action which has so nearly come about that it can practically be regarded as already having taken place. Thus, despite appearances, the fate of the wicked is disastrous.<sup>104</sup>

While Snaith says *sapu* ("come to an end") is in the plural to indicate the fulness and completeness of the disaster,<sup>105</sup> the RSV seems to reposit the MT *sapu* to read *supu*, the qal passive of *sapah* ("sweep or snatch away"). The idea is that the wicked will leave no trace upon the earth.

vs. 20:

They are like a dream when one awakes,  
on awaking you despise their phantoms.

*alam* ("image," "dream") is well documented in the Ugaritic 'hlm' ("dream"), but it occurs only here in the Psalter.<sup>106</sup>

*tibzeh* ("despise") denotes here "to slight, treat as of slight importance," as one regards a dream when awaking.<sup>107</sup> The wicked, who now seem so secure in prosperity, are as unsubstantial as a dream.

101. BDB, *op. cit.*, p. 996; cf. Snaith, *op. cit.*, p. 105. Dahood thinks this is a poetic name for the underworld, *op. cit.*, p. 192.

102. Weiser, *op. cit.*, p.512.

103. BDB, p. 921; cf. Job 21 :13.

104. Snaith, *Hymns*, p. 105.

105. *Ibid.*, p. 106; cf. BDOB, *op. cit.*, p. 692. Dahood, *op. cit.*, p. 193, thinks the devastation is intended to be a metaphor for Sheol with "terrors" as its parallel.

106. Cf. Dahood, *op. cit.*, p. 193, who says "terrors" is another poetic designation for the abode of the dead (cf. Job 18:14).

107. *Ibid.*; cf. Gen. 25:34.

When God intervenes and judges them, he will regard them as a phantom, illusions, or a dream.<sup>108</sup> This

... signifies a radical change in man's attitude of mind when he abandons the ground of visible data as the starting-point of his thinking and relies on the invisible reality of God to such a degree that it becomes by faith the unshakable foundation of his seeing and thinking.<sup>109</sup>

vs. 21:

When my soul was embittered,  
when I was pricked in heart,

*yithammes* ("sour, embittered") indicates; that the sight of the wicked's prosperity and the righteous' adversity soured the psalmist.<sup>110</sup> *Kilyotay* ("kidneys") are considered the seat of emotion and affection.<sup>111</sup> *'Estonan* means he was pierced through and through with envy.<sup>112</sup>

vs. 22:

I was stupid and ignorant,  
I was like a beast toward thee.

*behemot* ("beast, animal") may have behemoth in mind.<sup>113</sup> The Hebrew phrase here reads "a beast I was toward thee," which implies the fundamental difference between human and divine ways of thinking. He sees all things, and above all himself, in a dimension which had previously escaped his perception.<sup>114</sup>

vs. 23:

Nevertheless I am continually with thee;  
thou dost hold my right hand.

108. Kissane, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

109. Weiser, *op. cit.*, p. 512.

110. Dahood, *op. cit.*, p. 194.

111. BDB, *op. cit.*, p. 480; cf. Job 19:27.

112. *Ibid.*, p. 1042; Snaith, *op. cit.*, p. 106. Dahood reads "had dried up" and adds that just as milk, when it begins to sour, hardens, so the psalmist has hardened through his soured mind, *op. cit.*, p. 194. Oesterley, with Kittel, feels vs. 21 should be placed between vss. 16 and 17, *op. cit.*, p. 341.

113. *Ibid.*, p. 97; cf. Job 40:15. Terrien says this might refer to the hippopotamus, the colossus of flesh and the symbol of stupidity, *The Psalms and Their Meaning for Today* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1952), p. 258.

114. Weiser, *op. cit.*, p. 513.

*wa'ani* ("but I") opens the final strophe with this certainty of God's final victory, giving the psalmist the courage to remain with his God in spite of everything. The pious man cannot help seeing God as his only refuge, even if his plight leads him to doubt God's goodness and power.<sup>115</sup>

"To be at someone's right hand" (*b<sup>e</sup>yadh y<sup>e</sup>mini*) is to be in the place of honor (cf. 1 Kgs. 2:19; Pss. 45:9; 80:17) and "to have someone at one's right hand" is normally to enjoy his protection or support (Pss. 16:8; 109:31; 110:5; 121:5).<sup>116</sup>

In his view, to believe means to hold on to a permanent relationship of his life with God in the assurance that God will sustain him when man is no longer able to walk in his own strength.<sup>117</sup>

vs. 24:

Thou dost guide me with thy counsel  
and afterward thou wilt receive me to glory.

*v<sup>e</sup>'ahar* ("after these things"), an adverb, normally signifies "at a later time," but its precise meaning is debated.<sup>118</sup> *kabhodh tiqqaheni* ("take me to honor") could be a reference to something like the 'translation' of Enoch (Gen. 5:24). But one cannot be certain if the phrase refers to life beyond death. A great number of scholars do not think so. Mowinckel says the belief in the resurrection came as a result of Persian ideas<sup>119</sup> and that expressions like this point out the assurance that Yahweh will never fail his pious ones in times of mortal peril but will deliver them from evil and sudden death till they die "old and full of days." This faith deepened in later Judaism. "Psalm 73 shows how near even ancient Israel might approach to it: the bliss of communion with God becomes the highest value, going on beyond life and death."<sup>120</sup> He adds,<sup>121</sup>

115. Ringgren, *op. cit.*, pp. 72, 29; see note 19.

116. Johnson, *op. cit.*, p. 52, 52n; but in the law courts, apparently, it was customary for the accuser to stand at the right hand of the defendant (Ps. 109:6; Zech. 3:1).

117. Weiser, *op. cit.*, p. 513.

118. McCullough, *op. cit.*, p. 1391.

119. Mowinckel, *op. cit.*, p. 241.

120. *Ibid.*

121. *Ibid.*

But if the word ('translation') were to have this sense in Psalms 49 and 73, then 73:24, at any rate it would imply the doctrine that the pious person--or just the suppliant himself?—was carried away directly when dying, or without dying, and that would be something quite different from the Jewish faith in resurrection.

Snaith denies any resurrection faith here and argues that *ve'ahar* means "after these temporary distresses" and that *kabod* means glory or honor in the things of this, life.<sup>122</sup>

Gunkel and Schmidt emend the text so that it refers to the present life only. Gunkel would read "and in the path thou dost make me strong in heart," while Schmidt regroups certain consonants so as to read "thou drawest me by the hand after thee." Their emendations rest simply on their belief that the idea of the future life was incompatible with the thought world of the psalmists.<sup>123</sup>

It may be that the LXX, followed by the Vulgate, sees no reference to a future life, for it renders "in thy counsel didst thou guide me, and with glory didst thou receive me."<sup>124</sup>

Dahood thinks the psalmist does refer to his belief in eternal union with God in a future life.<sup>125</sup> Rowley admits that if 23ff. refer only to this life, then the poet has an odd way of expressing it, for he speaks of God receiving him, rather than giving him some material blessing. He first declares he enjoys fellowship with God now, and then he says God will receive him; so it must be of future fellowship that he speaks. This may be an incipient faith that God will continue to be a source of well-being after death. But this future life is a hope, not a doctrine.<sup>126</sup> Eternal life does not seem to be the real issue of the verse but is rather a description of the psalmist's joy at God's nearness. Regardless of how one interprets the verse, the psalmist has received the faith to overcome his present difficulties.

vs. 25:

Whom have I in heaven but thee?

And there is nothing upon earth that I desire besides thee.

122. Norman H. Snaith, *The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament* (London: Epworth Press, 1950), p. 89n; cf. Eichrodt, *op. cit.*, p. 522.

123. James, *op. cit.*, p. 210.

124. Kirkpatrick, *op. cit.*, p. 439.

125. Dahood, *op. cit.*, p. 194.

126. H. H. Rowley, *The Faith of Israel* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956), p. 173.

His joy is in his communion with God now. God is the prize possession. When one has God, he has all he needs.<sup>127</sup>

vs. 26:

My flesh and my heart may fail,  
but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for  
ever.

*she'eri ulbhabhi* ("my flesh and nay heart") describe the whole man (body and soul) in his earthy corporeity.<sup>128</sup> Flesh is often associated with psychical functions (Pss. 84:11f.; 16:9; 99:120; .lob 4:15).<sup>129</sup> Though his body and mind fail, God remains his certain possession.<sup>130</sup>

vs. 27:

For lo, those who are far from thee shall perish;  
thou dost put an end to those who are false to thee.

*zoneh* ("commit whoredom, play the harlot") refers to all Israelites who are faithless to the covenant. The figure of marriage is used to express the closeness of God and his people (cf. Hos. 2:2ff.; Isa. 54:5, 6), and apostasy is regarded as infidelity to the marriage vow. (cf. Hos. 4:15; Isa. 57:3; Ps. 106:39).<sup>131</sup>

vs. 28:

But for me it is good to be near God;  
I made the Lord God my refuge,  
that I may tell of all thy works.

*qirbat 'elohim* ("nearness of God") is a final declaration by the

127. Cf. Sheldon H. Blank, "The Nearness of God and Psalm Seventy-Three," *To Do and to Teach: Essays in Honor of Charles Lynn Pyatt*. (Lexington: College of the Bible, 1953), pp. 9-13, where he points out that the nearness of God may be regarded as a threat (Gen. 11:5-9; Judg. 5:4; Isa. 8:9-10) or as a boon (Isa. 50:8; Job 31:35; Ps. 23). There are three categories of people who enjoy God's presence as a boon: God's people, Israel collectively; elect of God, individuals like Moses, Gideon, Jeremiah; and the "crushed," "lowly," or "broken-hearted," like Job and the author of Ps. 73.

128. Eichrodt, *op. cit.*, p. 522; cf. Dahood, *op. cit.*, p. 196, for the idea of a new heart and body.

129. Johnson, *op. cit.*, p. 38. von Rad, *op. cit.*, p. 404, says 23ff. is a spiritual exegesis of the ancient phrase "I am thy portion."

130. McCullough, *op. cit.*, p. 391.

131. Kirkpatrick, *op. cit.*, p. 439; Briggs, *op. cit.*, p. 147. The latter thinks 27 & 28 are Maccabean glosses.

psalmist that he has great confidence in God and is relieved of his doubts as to his goodness.

*mal<sup>a</sup>khotheykha* unexpectedly shifts from the third person in the preceding colon to the second person. A similar phenomenon occurs in Pss. 22:26, 28; 102:16. These may be examples of *Hofstil* (court style) which in a Phoenician inscription shifts from a first-person reference to the king to a third-person reference.<sup>132</sup>

The LXX reads "that I may declare all thy praises in the gates of the daughter of Zion," as in 9:14. Kirkpatrick says though this may preserve the original sense, the present text sounds incomplete.<sup>133</sup>

### Conclusions

Psalm 73 is a deeply personal psalm of thanksgiving that contains some aspects of wisdom poetry perhaps due to some adoption from the cult in wisdom circles. It appears to be post-exilic in origin, though this is debatable. The psalm is a forceful testimony to a man who has learned to commit himself to God despite terrific struggles and doubts as to God's goodness.

He begins the psalm with the conclusion he has reached in his struggle. God is indeed upright and just to his pious ones. But the psalmist admits that he had come to a crisis in his faith when he saw the wicked prospering while God's righteous ones suffered. The wicked live polluted lives, yet feel no pain. God's people live pure lives and are stricken with oppression. The psalmist was at the point of voicing his remorse publicly but remained silent out of consideration of his people's faith. After the psalmist's vision has been illumined in God's sanctuary, he comes to see that appearances do not tell the whole story. The wicked have no real security. God has exposed them to ruin. Their fate is disastrous. The psalmist realizes that he enjoys-the blessed presence of God in his life. This is of more value than any earthly possession. When a man has God, he has everything he needs. This is the gospel he can share with others.

132. Dahood, *op. cit.*, pp. 196, 84.

133. *Op. cit.*, p. 439.

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