

## “The best precaution against stumbling”

### Psalm 73, a psalm of Asaph

When you read anything, it helps to know something about the author. We associate David with most of the psalms, but he didn't write all of them. Nearly a dozen bear the name of Asaph.

I've never met a person named Asaph. Whether the name is popular in Israel today, I can't say. The name Asaph means *collector* or *gatherer*. We all know many collectors; almost everyone collects something. Asaph became noted, however, for another reason.

Some people now get really excited about ancestry. In ancient Israel, they kept careful family records. You've heard about the **Twelve Tribes of Israel**. Because real estate had to remain within tribes and families, the Israelites scrupulously registered ancestries.

When Israel was originally surveyed and property allotted, one tribe didn't get what the others got. The descendants of Jacob's (Israel's) son Levi didn't receive significant land. Only Aaron's descendants (he was Moses' brother) could become the priests. All other Levites helped maintain worship activities. The tithes required of all Israelites went to support the Levites.

For centuries, Israel kept a movable house of worship—a huge, many layered tent with a large surrounding fence. The people had to regularly offer animal, grain, and other types of sacrifices where that tent was located. The sons of Levi took care of all the various details: slaughtering, cooking, cleaning, carrying the tent and other equipment, maintaining it, etc.

After about four hundred years (in David's time about 1000 BC), things changed. David conquered Jerusalem and brought the tent and the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. That affected the Levite's workload. When a circus moves from town to town, workers have to disassemble and reassemble, pack and unpack all the equipment. But if the circus never moves, they likely won't need much of the equipment or the manpower.

Most people associate David with shepherding, the psalms, Goliath, or Bathsheba, but David was an organization genius. He recognized that many of the Levites were gifted musicians and he re-assigned four thousand of them. David arranged for Asaph and his brothers to lead that group. They provided music even while their cousins were sacrificing animals on altars and for various parts of daily and Sabbath worship activities.

Some sang; others played trumpets, harps, and other instruments (See 1 Chronicles 15, 16, & 23; 2 Chronicles 29:25-30). Asaph seemed especially gifted with loud sounding cymbals, or possibly sistrums (ancient metal rattles or noise makers). Most important, David wanted worship services to center on thanking God.

Let's look at **A psalm of Asaph**  
**Psalm 73 New Living Bible**



This artist's drawing appeared on the cover of an issue of **Biblical Archaeology Review** Jan/Feb 1982. It depicts a third century BC burial cave fresco discovered at Mareshah, Israel, in about 1900. The original faded not long afterward.

**<sup>1</sup>Truly God is good to Israel, to those whose hearts are pure. <sup>2</sup>But as for me, I almost lost my footing. My feet were slipping, and I was almost gone.**



“Steps down into the cave. Don't lose your footing.”  
Flickr photo

**When you get to “proud old age,” doctors begin asking you batteries of questions, e.g. “Have you fallen recently?” “If so, how many times?”**

**You know that slipping and falling become life-threatening as you get older.**

**We don't need to cite any stats.**

Asaph, the cymbal player told how close he came to total disaster.

The Septuagint (Greek translation of the Old Testament) uses the word *micro* here.

**He crept within a whisker; “wee close” to losing it all.**

**Asaph, the great cymbal player wasn't referring to a hip, pelvis, or cranium-fracturing fall.**

**He meant something far more destructive that hardly anyone mentions.**

**I don't know if psychiatrists or licensed psychologists ever diagnose this condition.**

**Few sermons likely will be preached today on the subject.**

Yet this condition devastates many lives.

**It takes a greater toll than gun violence, all bombs, and Covid19 combined.**

This disorder led to the first murder and kills many people long before any physician pronounces them dead.

Though this malady destroys many people, probably no coroner ever lists it as a cause of death.

**We do not inherit this ailment, and we do not get it because we don’t wear a mask.**

People of all races and backgrounds suffer it—prominent surgeons, eloquent preachers, successful politicians, billionaires, homeless, church goers, atheists, and social media owners.

Asaph didn’t keep us in suspense about its cause.

**The seer-prophet Asaph confessed:**

<sup>3</sup> For I envied the proud when I saw them prosper despite their wickedness. <sup>4</sup> They seem to live such painless lives; their bodies are so healthy and strong. <sup>5</sup> They don’t have troubles like other people; they’re not plagued with problems like everyone else. <sup>6</sup> They wear pride like a jeweled necklace and clothe themselves with cruelty.



<sup>7</sup> These fat cats have everything their hearts could ever wish for! <sup>8</sup> They scoff and speak only evil; in

their pride they seek to crush others. <sup>9</sup> They boast against the very heavens, and their words strut throughout the earth. <sup>10</sup> And so the people are dismayed and confused, drinking in all their words. <sup>11</sup> “What does God know?” they ask.

“Does the Most High even know what’s happening?” <sup>12</sup> Look at these wicked people—enjoying a life of ease while their riches multiply.

<sup>13</sup> Did I keep my heart pure for nothing? Did I keep myself innocent for no reason? <sup>14</sup> I get nothing but trouble all day long; every morning brings me pain.

<sup>15</sup> If I had really spoken this way to others, I would have been a traitor to your people.

<sup>16</sup> So I tried to understand why the wicked prosper. But what a difficult task it is!

<sup>17</sup> Then I went into your sanctuary, O God, and I finally understood the destiny of the wicked. <sup>18</sup> Truly, you put them on a slippery path and send them sliding over the cliff to destruction. <sup>19</sup> In an instant they are destroyed, completely swept away by terrors. <sup>20</sup> When you arise, O Lord, you will laugh at their silly ideas as a person laughs at dreams in the morning.

**If you learned the Ten Commandments, you will recall the Tenth Command (Exodus 20: 17 NIV):**

**You shall not covet your neighbor’s house.  
You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his  
manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or  
anything that belongs to your neighbor.**

**In the *Septuagint* the word translated *covet*  
means to “set one’s heart upon, to long for.”**

**We see someone else’s success and want  
that image.**

**It especially galls us if the other person  
apparently succeeds in some illegal fashion.**

**In Hollywood, we often saw pimps drive  
fancy cars.**

**We heard how wealthy guys got rich  
scamming people.**

**Or the actress became famous through her  
skills on the couch.**

**Or someone got named to the team  
because of his/her nationality or colors.**

**Envy involves two recognizable steps.**

**First, we conclude that we deserve success more  
than those crooks showing off their riches.**

**Second, we begin to think about the injustice  
involved and become angry with God.**

**Note verses 7-16.**

**The way out is:**

**admit the source of our inner turmoil;**

**Confess our bitterness to God;**

**Recognize how much God has given us;  
and how merciful he has been.**

**Trust that God will eventually punish injustice.**

<sup>21</sup> Then I realized that my heart was bitter, and I  
was all torn up inside. <sup>22</sup> I was so foolish and  
ignorant—I must have seemed like a senseless  
animal to you. <sup>23</sup> Yet I still belong to you; you hold  
my right hand. <sup>24</sup> You guide me with your counsel,  
leading me to a glorious destiny. <sup>25</sup> Whom have I in  
heaven but you? I desire you more than anything on  
earth. <sup>26</sup> My health may fail, and my spirit may grow  
weak, but God remains the strength of my heart; he  
is mine forever.

<sup>27</sup> Those who desert him will perish, for you destroy  
those who abandon you.

- **Not only must we quit our envy.**

- **The Lord warns us about bitterness.**

Ephesians 4:30, 31 NIV

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with  
whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.  
Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and  
slander, along with every form of malice.

**This tells I have me much cleaning work to do.**

<sup>28</sup> But as for me, how good it is to be near (cleave to) God! I have made the Sovereign LORD my shelter, and I will tell everyone about the wonderful things you do.

I have a photocopy of the following story, but I can't recall the author's name. I know only that either the book's title or a section of the book was entitled *Gratitude*. I think the setting was the British Isles. The mother of the boy involved told the author the story:

“He was a boy who apparently had little for which one could have expected him to be grateful. As a child he had not received many toys because he had no arms or legs, and much of his young life had been spent in hospitals. By the time I heard of him he was nineteen, and was then living at home. A natural extrovert, there was nothing he enjoyed more than being taken to the village pub, where he would be plumped down in a corner and enjoy drinking with his many friends. His mother said that he was naturally gregarious, and was always the center of lively discussions and much laughter and happiness. He had many friends, and enjoyed life.

His mother found this difficult to understand. One day she asked him how, with his appalling disabilities, he was not bitter that he had not been made like other men. His reply surprised her, and she

told me she could not understand where he had learnt it-certainly, she said, not from herself. Quite simply his reply was this: **'I am extraordinarily blessed, after all God must love me in a very special way to give me such a cross like this to bear. So why should I, how could I, be bitter?'** He was one of the most grateful of men. He understood a little of what the doctors and nurses and his parents had tried to do to help him, but his gratitude was wider, and extended to the good God who had given him such a heavy cross to bear.

**In everything, we thank God.**

**Take this challenge:**

- **Spend one day this week thanking God in every circumstance.**
- **If bitterness comes, replace it with gratitude.**
- **Be present every time the church doors open to encourage others to praise, thank, and honor God.**

**You'll live longer, make your family happier and enjoy life more and please God.**

**You'll also be far less likely to fall.**

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