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Psalm 73: A Corrective to a Modern Misunderstanding

Elmer A. Martens

Tension and struggle flow like lava from a volcano in Psalm 73. The difficulty uppermost in the mind of the Psalmist is the carefree, even prosperous life of the evil-doers in contrast to his own torment as a godly person. Such a condition is contrary to the basic belief that God rewards the good with good.

The purpose of the essay is first to mine this poem for its message and to relate it to the so-called “gospel of health and wealth.” A secondary purpose is to exhibit a particular method of exegesis. By following the suggested ten steps of the “form-al method”, precious insights, like gold, will be uncovered. For purposes of clarity, the method of exegesis, which guides the commentary, is sketched alongside.

Commentary

Even a first reading of Psalm 73 makes one aware of an emotional intensity in the Psalm as well as some shifts of mood. The early part of the Psalm is dark, with skies heavily overcast. However, light breaks through so that the Psalm, which began with a conundrum, ends in the full sunlight of resolution.

My translation of the Psalm, while original, borrows an apt phrase now and again from other versions.¹

The “Form-al” Method of Exegesis:

Read the text aloud.

Such an exercise, especially if done in the original languages, sensitizes one to repetitions, assonances, and word play of the text. More important, especially if the texts are poetic, reading aloud enables the reader to enter into the mood of the text.

Translate the text.

Prepare an English translation from the original, or failing that, read from various English and other language translations. No

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one translation, even if expansive, can capture all the nuances of the original. Translators make word choices. Many of the word choices represent a translator's personal preference, but others betray a problem, perhaps a textual variant in the original.

This translation represents a decision on three major textual variants. The rendering in verse 4, "For they seem exempt from pain; sound and sleek in their body" is a result of dividing a Hebrew word but leaving the consonants the same, a suggestion followed increasingly by scholars, including the conservative ones. In verse 7 the sentence "Their iniquity bulges with fat" rather than "the eyes bulged with fat" follows the Greek and the Syriac readings. My translation of verse 10 attempts to handle a problematic Hebrew reading as it stands. Following conjectural emendations, the RSV has a totally different sense: "Therefore the people turn and praise them; and find no fault in them."

Examine textual variants.

In college and seminary one learns the criteria for making judgements about textual options that have come down to us through the transmission of the text. For someone following the English translation, the New American Standard Bible, for example, frequently calls attention to such variants in the margin.

PSALM 73
A Psalm of Asaph

- ¹Surely God is good to Israel,
to the ones pure in heart.
- ²As for me, my feet had almost slipped,
my steps all but faltered.
- ³For I was envious of the braggarts;
I was observing the prosperity of the wicked,
- ⁴For they seem exempt from pain,
sound and sleek in their body.
- ⁵Theirs is not the trouble of ordinary men,
and they are not plagued like people generally.
- ⁶For this reason arrogance is their necklace;
with the garment of violence they wrap themselves round.

- ⁷Their iniquity bulges like fat;
The imaginations of their heart run rampant.
- ⁸They mock and they speak with malice.
They talk down as oppressors perched on high.
- ⁹They set their lip over heaven
and their tongue engulfs the earth.
- ¹⁰Therefore, that kind of people resort to this:
even the abundant waters, they gulp for themselves.
- ¹¹And they say, "How does God know?
"Is there knowledge with the Most High?"
- ¹²Behold, these are the wicked —
unconcerned about the Eternal; increased in wealth.
- ¹³Surely it was pointless that I kept my heart clean,
and that I washed my hands in innocence;
- ¹⁴And suffered torment all the day
and was chastened every morning anew.
- ¹⁵If I say, "I will speak as they do,"
Behold I will betray a generation of your children.
- ¹⁶And I tried to understand this;
A distressful thing it was for me,
- ¹⁷Until I went into God's sanctuary,
For then I discerned their destiny.
- ¹⁸Surely in slippery places you set them;
you cause them to fall into ruin.
- ¹⁹How quickly disaster will be theirs;
They will be totally finished off by terrors.
- ²⁰Like a dream upon awakening, O Lord
when aroused you will lightly dismiss their figure.
- ²¹When my mind was embittered
and my emotions torn up
- ²²I was senseless and did not understand;
I was as a beast before you.
- ²³Nevertheless I am always with you;
You will hold my right hand.

²⁴With your counsel you lead me,
and afterward receive me with honor.

²⁵Whom do I have in the heavens but you?
And having you, I desire nothing on earth.

²⁶My flesh and my heart fail;
God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

²⁷For behold those who go far from you will perish;
You will silence all who desert you.

²⁸As for me, the nearness of God is my good;
I have set my refuge in the Lord God Declaring all your works.

Psalms 73, itself a unit, is a Psalm by or to Asaph, founder of one of the temple choirs (I Chron. 25:1). It is the first of the series of eleven Psalms (Psalm 73-83) that carries this superscription. Psalm 50 is also by Asaph, making 12 Psalms in all attributed to Asaph. Asaph and Jeduthun of the Levitical tribes were the directors of choirs drawn from two clans of the Levite tribe (I Chron. 6:31, 33, 39, 44). Two of Asaph's Psalms are laments (Psalms 74 & 79). In the latter classification of Psalms into five "books", Psalm 73 is the lead-off Psalm in the larger unit of Book III (Psalm 73-106).

Establish the unit.

A unit is a self-contained intelligible text portion. A sentence is a unit, of course, but the unit here in question is an independent free standing body of material, usually containing several sentences. Traditionally the biblical passages have been marked off into paragraphs, but while our English methods of composition may be applicable, attention to Hebrew and Greek language form such as the judgement speech or the song parable is important in determining the beginning and ending of a unit. Obviously in the Psalms the entire Psalm chapter provides a unit; it will be composed of subunits.

While much of the biblical material easily yields to form analysis, this Psalm is difficult. Several structural scaffolds have been suggested by scholars. The following will serve for the ensuing comments.

Prepare a structural analysis

A structural analysis is like an outline, except that an outline is primarily, if not exclusively, concerned with the content of a passage and so assumes knowledge of the text's intention. But it is precisely the intention of a passage that is at stake. This intention is not likely to be grasped at the outset but comes only after analysis and synthesis. It is best then to prepare a literary scaffolding of the text

Structural Analysis

- I. Affirmation (Proverb) v.1
- II. Narrative vv. 2-20
 - A. Assessment of Situation vv. 2-12
 1. Confession v. 2

2. Description of Problem (Wicked) vv. 3-12
 - a. Identification v. 3
 - b. Characterization vv. 4-11
 - 1) via statements vv. 4-10
 - 2) via speech report v. 11
3. Reaction to Situation vv. 13-20
 - a. Self-characterization vv. 13-16
 - b. Report of Action v. 17
 - c. Affirmation vv. 18-20
- III. Reflection/Thanksgiving vv. 21-28
 - A. Confession vv. 21-22
 - B. Affirmation of Confidence vv. 23-26
 - C. Contrast/Summary vv. 27-28

by giving attention to the form instead of the content of the passage. Essentially a form analysis involves standing back from the content and labeling the different parts of the text formally.

The structure of Psalm 73 suggests the form known as the individual thanksgiving song. In this kind of song, the poet usually begins with an exhortation to thanksgiving, then in narrative form, much like our personal testimonies, the writer relates how he has been helped by God. He concludes on a thanksgiving note. Among the Psalms 30 is a choice example of a thanksgiving Psalm.

Thanksgiving Psalms fit with worship. Several indicators of worship appear in Psalm 73. The opening line speaks of "Israel," perhaps best thought of as an assembly. The reference to the "pure in heart" (v. 1) could be an allusion to the entrance liturgies as in Psalm 15 which describe the kind of people, essentially the pure in heart, who may abide in the Lord's tent and on his holy hill. The worship aspect also surfaces in that pivotal clause: "Until I went into God's sanctuary" (v. 17). Moreover, the final verse with its note about drawing near to God, and its intention of declaring God's works takes one into a worship setting.

But the Psalm has another component, namely an academic one which is generally quite foreign to thanksgiving songs. The writer raises questions about the wicked, about prosperity. He asked about

Determine the genre.

A careful structure allows one to determine the genre. "Genre" refers to the kind of literature. Song, judgement speech, sermon, salvation speech and symbolic action are examples of literary genre. Sometimes the genre will suggest itself more immediately apart from form analysis. At other times the form analysis will clarify the genre. Steps five and six are sometimes interchangeable. Scholars work on the assumption that identification of the genre, together with form analysis will give a clue as to the social setting in which the text was at one time put to use.

knowledge (v.11), enquiring “How does God know?” This kind of vocabulary is familiar to us from Proverbs. Add to these considerations such terminology as “counsel” (v. 24), “discern” (v. 17), “senseless” (v. 22), “understand” (v. 16), “destiny” (v. 17): then it becomes clear why some have felt this is a wisdom rather than a thanksgiving Psalm. Usually a sharp distinction is made between worship and wisdom. The first belongs in the temple; the second in the palace court. One may agree, however, with Leslie Allen who types this Psalm as an individual song of thanksgiving belonging to worship.² Its central question and its language suggest the preoccupants of someone trained in wisdom school. It would be helpful then to think of a university student or teacher of modern days coming to the place of worship, but quite distraught because of an intellectual puzzle.

A clue to the intensity of that puzzle comes when one examines one of the recurring terms in this Psalm, namely “heart.” Indeed the word occurs a total of six times (vv. 1, 7, 13, 21, 26). Martin Buber, a Jewish scholar, regarded this word as the key word in the Psalm. If in our English versions the word is not necessarily translated by the term “heart,” it is for good reasons. The word functions in idioms.

The Hebrew word “heart” may refer to the bodily organ (II Kings 9:24). Symbolically, as in English, “heart” suggests innerness, and so the Bible speaks of the “heart of the sea” (Exodus 15:8) or the “midst (literally, “heart”) of heaven” (Deut. 4:11). The term refers in Hebrew to the center of the person and may be thought of as disposition or character. “God gave Saul another heart” (I Sam. 10:9). Of Joshua it was said that “his heart was lifted up” (II Chron. 17:6). The Psalmist emphasized that as for him, “My heart is fixed” (Psalm 57:7, Psalm 108:1). When Solomon speaks of people walking before God with all their heart, he is referring to the totality of the person (I Kings 8:23).

A striking difference between English and Hebrew usage is the way “heart” in Hebrew represents the thought processes. While the word “heart” may refer to emotions as in such expressions “being merry of heart” (Judg. 16:25), it is the inward organs, including the kidneys,

Examine key words and concepts.

Word studies have long been an important tool for exegesis. Studies of the meaning of words in Hebrew and in Greek make use of dictionaries, concordances and monographs. Not only is the formal definition important, but an assumption of the usage of a word or concept in different contexts often furnishes helpful insights. The literary scaffolding is often a help in selecting key terms, for one may wish to single out a key term from each major block. A key term is one, which like “covenant,” invites investigation for its theological weight.

where the Hebrew sees his emotions located. Usually, "heart" refers to thinking rather than to emotions. Leaders are said to have "great thoughts of heart" (Judg. 5:15). Meditation is meditation of the heart (Psalm 19:14). Rather than speaking of wisdom as belonging to the mind or intellect, the Old Testament speaks of "the wise of heart" (I Kings 3:12) and of God who fills persons with "wisdom of heart" (Exodus 35:35). In Psalm 73 the frequent references to "heart" indicate the mental anguish of the Psalmist. He speaks of his mind (lit., "heart") being embittered and his emotions (lit., his inward parts) pierced (v. 21). The prosperity of the wicked with their evil ways and their easy dismissal of God put him to thinking; they generate mental anguish and wrestling.

At the same time the Psalmist uses "heart" to apply to his person when he speaks of "keeping his heart clean" (v. 13). Also, having come to some resolution, he says "God is the strength of my heart. . ." (v. 26). The frequent usage of the word "heart" conveys both the intellectual side of the conflict as well as the way in which the writer's total person is caught up in the situation. Such sentiment is summarized in v. 16: "And I tried to understand this; a distressful thing it was for me."

A second key term, one around which the "narrative" portions center, is the word "wicked." It is a word very much in use in the Psalms, where one finds it a total of eighty times. Often the "wicked" are contrasted with the "just" (cf. Psalm 58). Elsewhere, as in Psalm 37, the wicked are described as persons who are vicious and plot against others, gnashing against others with their teeth (37:12). They are unethical; they borrow and do not pay back (37:21). They are violent, resorting to the sword (37:14). Sometimes the "wicked" are Gentiles (Psalm 82).

It may be, as Mowinckel suggests, that in Psalm 73 the "wicked" are the pagan over-lords, or they may be fellow travelers among 'apostate' Jews.³ The "wicked" are described as proud (v. 6). From superior positions, they talk down to others and harbor all kinds of evil in their minds (v. 7). Two characteristics are noted in particular: they are greedy and they ignore God. Their greed is one which gobbles all in sight. Their lip is "set over the heavens," perhaps to indicate how big a mouth or appetite they have. Quiet like an insect which shoots out its tongue to take prey, so the wicked lap up all on the earth (v. 9). As though that were not enough, in an extravagance of arrogance they claim a monopoly on the waters of the sea (v. 10). Moreover, they ignore God, dismissing Him with the comment, "How can God know?" as though their tactics were so cleverly executed that they even hoodwink God. The label "braggarts" (v. 3) refers to the way they put others down, largely because of their own prosperity, and to the callous attitude they exhibit to the things of God. Verse 12 summarizes: "These are the wicked — unconcerned about the Eternal; increased in wealth."

All the "theology" of the writer would dictate that such evil persons

should have a hard lot in life. But no! They do not experience hurt (v. 4); they are exempt from trouble such as comes to people generally. And this carefree life only increases their arrogance as if to say, "We can't be all bad."

Who then are they that are tormented? The just and those that work at keeping their hearts clean (vv. 13-14)! That which the writer knows and that which Scripture teaches about a righteous God is now called into question by this state of affairs.

How does the poet handle this paradoxical situation? It is correct to say that v. 17 is a pivotal verse "The place of worship is the solution to life's problems." In the sanctuary he began to understand. There he discerned the destiny of the evil doers. But there is more to his answer and the "more" emerges as one investigates the Psalm to see how its various parts relate to each other.

Within the narrative there are two parts. In the first the "problem" posed by the prosperity of the wicked is detailed, and that in vivid language, as noted above. But the second half of the story is in vv. 13-20 which describe the reaction to the situation. The writer is arrested in spinning out his increasingly self-entangling thoughts and by recognizing that were he to throw in his lot with the wicked, he would betray an entire generation of God's people (v. 15). For him to parade his frustration could damage and even destroy others in their faith. There are certain inward struggles, which when shared publicly, only bring harm. Not always is there profit in "letting it all hang out." But if that is a conclusion of a psychological nature, of more help are the theological insights affirmed in verses 18-20. There one sees how the wicked appear from God's perspective: their ruin is inevitable. God takes as much account of these "boasters" as a dreamer upon awakening takes of his dream fantasies. In short, which is the real world? Is it the world where the wicked hold sway? Or is it the world where God has the last word? And if God has the final word which brings about the ruin of the wicked, why then be envious of the evil doers?

Relate the parts.

With this step one moves from analysis to synthesis. Essentially one reviews the form analysis and inquires about the "fit" of its parts. How does part I relate to part II? How do sections within each major part relate to each other? One must ask not only how in serial fashion parts "A" relate to "B" and "C", but how "F" relates to "A" or to "D". It is often through the careful probing of these relationships that fresh insights about a passage emerge.

But the poem extends beyond the narrative of verses 2-20. What do verses 21-28 add? These verses are significant for two reasons. First, they represent a recapitulation of the Psalmist's experience. As in verses 2 and 16, where mention is made of distress and near upset of equilibrium, so in verse 21 there is a rehearsal of his misgivings and his

emotional upheaval. The “affirmation of confidence” in vv. 23-26 recalls his pillars of belief which are his support. Here, one may argue, he details what he saw when he entered the sanctuary. God will uphold his right hand (v. 23). God will lead him with his counsel (v. 24). God is the strength of his heart (v. 26). The last two verses point the new direction. After verse 20, except for the summary contrast, the wicked have dropped from view. To paraphrase, the new position is, “I will not be enamored with the passing glamor of the prosperous wicked. My mainstay is to be close to God and to declare his works.” In verses 21-28, he looks back over his shoulder at his experience and firms up what he has learned.

The second function of these reflective-type statements in verses 21-28 is to point up how opposite such a “just” person is from the wicked. The wicked dismiss God, questioning whether God even knows (v. 11). The believer relies on God’s knowledge and counsel to lead him (v. 18). For the wicked his wealth is his possession (v. 12). For the believer God is his strength and his portion (v. 26). The wicked desires ever more and more, and in his greed seizes the seats as though they were his own (v. 10). The believer asserts, “Having you (God), I desire nothing on earth.” The wicked boasts of his health and wealth; the believer boasts in God. The wicked talks down to others and mocks (v. 8). The believer declares God’s works (v. 28). The wicked will fall to ruin (v. 8). The believer is held by God’s right hand and like Enoch (Genesis 5:24) is afterward to be “received into glory” (v. 24).

If verses 2-20 is the story line and verses 21-28 the reflective thanksgiving and recapitulation, what is the purpose of the opening line about God’s goodness to those pure in heart? Some scholars hold that verse 1 is the conclusion of the writer’s struggle placed now at the beginning of the poem.⁴ But nothing else in the Psalm indicates that such was his conclusion. Another preferable way, I think, is to hear the opening line as the orthodox teaching. This is what the Psalmist knows from tradition: God is good to Israel and to those pure in heart. And herein lies the problem. The doctrinal teaching is not confirmed by observation. By comparison the evil-doers fare better than the God-fearers. Resolution comes eventually, not in the intellectual harmonization of doctrine and experience, but in the recognition of how large is the believer’s wealth in having God. Resolution comes also in deciding that he will commit himself to seek refuge in God and to declare God’s works to others. He will not parade his doubts; he will proclaim God’s acts. God, rather than the wicked, fills his horizon.

We may draw our insights together in a summary statement of the Psalm. For Psalm 73, the intention or thrust statement might be paraphrased: The prosperity and trouble-free life of evil persons (vv. 2-20), though a challenge to a theology of God’s

Determine the intention of the passage.

The text has a message, an intention, a thrust. A further step in the synthesis is to pinpoint the intention summary-

goodness extended to the pure in heart (v. 1), is manageable when one considers the evil-doers' destiny and comes to grips with the great boon of God's counsel, presence and power (vv. 21-28). The Psalmist has come to understand the puzzle which arose when the faith statement, "God is good to the pure in heart" was apparently contradicted by his actual experience, namely the prosperity of the wicked. His solution is to see that the actual, observable experience of the wicked is not the whole story. The destiny of the wicked is gruesome. Moreover, he has a fresh-hold on what is meant by God's goodness. It includes those intangible values of God's counsel, presence and power.

Having determined the message of the Psalm, one can compare or contrast it with other scriptures or one can "locate it" theologically in the rest of the biblical material. First, one would in examining the immediate context, to cite but one possibility, take note of Psalm 10:3. "The wicked boast of their hearts' desire," and contrast such a statement with Psalm 44:8 "In God we boast all the day." Beyond the Psalms one would explore Habakkuk which wrestles with a similar question and comes to similar answers. Elsewhere in the Old Testament the book of Job is applicable to the subject matter in hand. For the New Testament counterpart one may cite the parable of the rich land owner preparing to build greater barns. To such come the instructive word of Jesus, ". . . life is more than food, and the body than clothing." (Luke 12:23).

fashion in one sentence. This summary draws on the structure, the content, the "agenda" which occasioned the passage. This summary should have regard to the various blocks of material depicted in the structural analysis. Sometimes it is important to identify the occasion or the agenda which gave rise to the text. Certainly the summary takes account of the insights derived in the preceding eight steps. If the summary is sometimes cumbersome and for that matter, bland, it is still worthwhile, for it captures the text in a nutshell. Were one to proceed with a sermon, the summary statement would be raw material for sermon proposition.

Examine the text's intention in the context of scripture.

This step is similar to Step Eight, the relating of the parts. Only now one goes beyond the border of a text to ask how the thrust statement relates to other scripture. One can think of widening concentric circles. How does the message of the text "fit" to what precedes or follows in the same book? How does the message fit with a larger corpus, namely wisdom, prophetic, or historical materials? How does the "message" relate to the larger block, the Old Testament, and beyond that, the New Testament? In short, as a final step in the exegetical process, one takes a look around to see how this particular text functions in the entire scripture.

Application

Various facets of the thrust statement could serve as direction for a sermon.⁵ For example, how does one cope with the apparent con-

tradition between doctrine and experience generally? Or, to address the question focused in this issue **DIRECTION**, how is one to position oneself vis-a-vis the gospel of health and wealth which holds that God's goodness when claimed, fairly ensures both health and wealth?

To that position this Psalm requires us to make the following assessment. First, it does not follow that because God is good to Israel and to those who are pure in heart that his goodness will be expressed in health and wealth. Quite the opposite. It was the evil segment of society which enjoyed health ("sound and sleek in body", v. 4) and wealth (v. 12). The Psalmist in turn complained of envy. He may have himself lacked both health and wealth. He describes his torment, his chastenings, his trouble. No, one cannot make the equation: God's goodness leads in every case to provision of health and wealth. While it is true that God is good, that goodness does not give the believers a categorical right to claim health and wealth from him.

It is improper to seize upon one set of biblical texts, such as those that promise prosperity, and then to ignore those examples and those texts that make clear that a believer is not exempt from trouble. In the Old Testament, the story of Job should set aside for all time the erroneous notion that God unfailingly brings material prosperity upon those who are upright. In the New Testament Paul's life of suffering hardly warrants the conclusion that the material abundance is guaranteed the believer (Romans 8:18; I Cor. 4:11-13). The book of I Peter is written to devout people but who suffer. They are encouraged to endure by God's grace; not to lay claim to "health and wealth." We cannot in honesty with the text so systemize the scripture as to isolate glowing promises and set aside those statements less to our liking.

A more biblical approach is to recognize that both the promise for "good" and those statements about a believer's suffering are part of the total picture. One of the solutions is to find with the Psalmist what indeed is the definition of "good" in that faith statement which holds that "God is good to Israel." The "good" is not necessarily that of material prosperity though it may at times include it.

Second, the values of health and wealth must be measured against other values for the believer. This Psalm is no broadside slam against wealth or the importance of health, but it clearly points to values more prized than either: the counsel of an ever-present God; the strength of God when flesh and heart fail, and the intimacy possible with God for a believer. By setting such a high premium on health and wealth, modern "evangelists" of this gospel err. These evangelists advocate material substance as a believer's rightful portion. The Psalmist turns away from such superficiality and holds, "And having you (God) I desire nothing on earth" (v. 25).

The health and wealth advocates are correct in wanting to make faith relevant to the present day circumstances. However, since a basic problem of American culture is already a materialism that minimizes if not neutralizes the spiritual dimension of life, the gospel of health and wealth rather than curbing materialism, fuels it. The Christian must call people first to God and not first to His gifts. To do otherwise is to court the temptation of idolatry, namely to make God's gifts gods. In a materialistically oriented culture, the virtues of the spiritual values, especially God's presence, power and purpose need to be highlighted. It was to this spiritual set of values that Asaph's choir song of Psalm 73 points.

Third, to equate God's goodness with good health and lavish wealth is precisely the view that well-nigh led the Psalmist's feet to slip. One might imagine that someone had preached to him the notion that since God was good to Israel, he as "believer" was entitled to material abundance. Persons embracing such a gospel are likely to meet with experiences that will contradict the teaching. Then they will be led on slippery paths. Their doubt could destroy their own stability as well as that of future generations. Unless they hurry into the sacred place and discern a better theology, they might well be a casualty, and in their own collapse of faith, implicate future generations.

The writer of Psalm 73 reports his own experience and turns it about in his soul so as to anchor down the insights to which God led him. In doing so, he helps virtually every believer who has pondered the wellbeing of carefree and godless neighbors in contrast to personal piety. The Psalmist also sheds light on a modern overstatement that interprets God's goodness as issuing without fail in health and wealth. Such a misunderstanding of the meaning of God's goodness must be firmly rejected.

Notes

¹ For helpful critique and suggestions both in translation and exposition, I wish to credit my students Mike Luper and Nzash Lumeya.

² Leslie Allen, "Psalm 73: An Analysis", *Tyndale Bulletin* 33 (1982): 93-118, (esp. 116). This excellent article examines rhetorical and structural research approaches to the Psalm.

³ Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship* (New York: Abington, 1962) 2:36.

⁴ Elmer Leslie, *The Psalms* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1949), p. 418.

⁵ See D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Faith on Trial* (London: Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1965), for nine excellent sermons on Psalm 73, mostly on verses 17-28. The book is highly recommended.