

Asaph - "Distraction: The Quiet Enemy"



1. **(Background)** Asaph was a Levite by descent, the son of Berechiah (1 Chron 6:39). He was one of the leaders of the amazing choir King David organized for the temple that would be built after his death (cf. 1 Chron 6:31ff). Asaph is credited with writing 12 psalms (50, 73-83). His reputation was nearly legendary, being named alongside David nearly 600 years later in the context of *second temple* Jerusalem (Neh 12:46). He was also given the title of a “seer,” a prophetic mantle ascribed to numerous Old Testament figures (2 Chron 29:30).
2. **(Q1)** “The wicked” is an OT phrase that typically refers to those *outside* covenant Israel, who have rejected Yahweh. It appears 238x in the OT, nearly one third of them in the Psalms alone. This is a much bigger idea than merely a “sinner,” someone who *does* wicked things. “The arrogant” is a poetic equivalent for “the wicked” in this psalm. They should be understood to be one and the same.
It is very important to not lose sight of *what* Asaph envied. He did *not* envy the *prosperity* of “the wicked,” or “the arrogant.” There were certainly prosperous Jews in Asaph’s circle of acquaintances. He envied “the arrogant” whose prosperity was “unfair” to him. This is one more manifestation of what I called “the payback principle” that we studied in the study on Job (i.e. the righteous get blessed, the wicked get nuked).
3. **(Q2-vs4)** “Fat and sleek” (ESV), “fat” (NAS) must be understood as one who is well-fed (i.e. affluent and at ease). The Hebrew word here (*barily*) is used 6x in the story of the two types of cows Pharaoh saw in the dream Joseph interpreted in Genesis 41.
4. **(Q2-vs6)** The people Asaph is rehearsing in his psalm actually *want* others to know of their arrogance and cruelty to others who are “beneath” them. They “display” these attributes, according to Asaph (e.g. “necklace” and “garment”). There is a fragrance in their conduct, not just wickedness itself.
5. **(Q3)** Asaph had concluded the John Piper book, *Don’t Waste Your Life*, was a lie. He concluded that “wasting” one’s life was done by being faithful to Yahweh and getting nothing for it. In fact, things were *worse* for those who were faithful. Asaph felt that at the end of the day, he was broken and bruised for his righteousness, and the wicked were full and at ease.
6. **(Q4)** The extent of Asaph’s description of “the wicked” (10 out of 28 verses) indicates that he had been *studying* these people, not merely noticing them! This is *not* the journal entry for a bad day at the sanctuary. We must assume that Asaph’s statements about “the wicked” in this psalm are *his own conclusions*, not the result of conversations with these people. In other words, Asaph was *not* told these things, he merely assumed them to be true because he had concluded they were.
7. **(verse 15)** This is a *very* important verse. Asaph recognized the corrosive and destructive affect of sharing these fatalistic feelings with those around him would have. We have to remind ourselves that this guy’s “in the ministry!” This verse provides a very important principle for any believer who is responsible for the spiritual well-being of another Christian. How we talk about our feelings and to whom is something we must always pay attention to. Asaph knew this even in the midst of his despondency.
8. It is also reasonable to assume that Asaph had ceased to worship Yahweh in spirit and truth. If his mind was “set on the flesh,” then the Lord would *not* have been on his mind, even while leading others in worship.
9. **(Q9)** The verb translated “looking to” (ESV), “fixing” (NAS) and “let us fix” (NIV) is the Greek word, *apharadō*, which means to turn from looking at one thing in order to fix one’s eyes on something else. This *must*

be understood as much of a description of looking *away*, as it is of looking *at*. Also, the force of the verb is that this activity is to be continual, non-cessation “looking” (present tense).



“Stumbling Stones”

1. **(Q2)** We need to be careful about superimposing 21st century standards of beauty, appearance, and fitness on this passage. It would be easy to miss the point here. Asaph’s struggle is *stated* in verse 3. What follows is detailed descriptive “proof” of the prosperity of the wicked. “Fatness” was *proof* of affluence in the ANE, which was a subsistence culture. This is why you don’t find “fat” people in 3rd world countries. A “fat” body was proof of a “fat” bank account, in Asaph’s day.
2. **(Q2-v10)** The Hebrew here is *very* difficult. It seems safest to limit our comments to this: These arrogant, vocal mockers have a very negative effect on the righteous because their behavior, linked with their prosperity, *and* God’s apparent toleration of them, makes it very difficult to value a life of deprivation and uprightness in regards to sin and indulgence.
3. **(Q4)** Don’t miss this, or let your group miss this! You need to get your answer(s) to this question from Asaph, *not yourself!* Look again at verses 2-3, this is where he tells us how he got in this mess in the first place:

“But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled, my steps had nearly slipped. For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.” Psalm 73:2, 3

4. **(Q6-17a)** We need to guard against the idea that Asaph “got alone” or that he found a place of relative quiet where he could think and pray his way out of this. Asaph did *not* “retreat.” The “sanctuary of God” in Asaph’s day was a version of the Tabernacle of Exodus. There was not yet a temple in Jerusalem. The sanctuary of the Lord would *not* have been a reclusive or quiet environment. There would have been many people, Levites and priests, as well as the chaos associated with the slaughter of animals and the verbal prayers associated with what we call “temple worship.” It was anything but quiet and secluded! Asaph’s change of location facilitated a change in orientation more than anything. He moved himself away from visible sight of the wicked into a place he associated with Yahweh’s presence and worship.



“Going Deeper”

1. **(Q1)** “If Asaph’s struggle was due to the “blessed” life the wicked were enjoying, his true motives for obedience were unmasked in his anger. What were his real motives, apparently? Do you believe God “owes” you for living “like a good Christian”?”
2. **(Q3)** “Why do *you* seek to please God?” (HINT: Look for a distinction between what I *get* from obedience, versus God’s worth as a motivation.)
3. **(Q6–17b-20)** “What does Solomon’s statement in Ecc 7:2 have to say about Asaph’s perspective once he got in the sanctuary? How often have you been in the “house of mourning, and what effect did it have on your own perspectives about life?”
4. **(Q8-1 Kings 21)** “Have you ever found yourself acting like Ahab, blind to options because you were obsessed with one idea, one thing, or one method? What became of it? How would you do things differently as a result of this chapter?”