

Psalm 73:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end.

Analysis

Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end. This verse marks the psalm's decisive turning point. After cataloguing the prosperity of the wicked (verses 4-12) and confessing his own despair (verses 13-16), Asaph identifies the moment when his perspective transformed. The Hebrew *ad* (עַד, "until") signals the transition from confusion to clarity.

"The sanctuary of God" (miqdeshey-El, מִקְדֵּשֶׁי־אֱלֹהִים) refers to the temple or tabernacle—the place of divine presence and revelation. Some scholars note the plural form (miqdeshey) may indicate the sanctuary complex or emphasize its sacred nature. In this sacred space, Asaph gained understanding unavailable through ordinary observation.

"Then understood I" (avinah, אָבִינוּ) uses the verb *bin*, meaning to discern, perceive, understand with insight. This is not intellectual knowledge alone but spiritual perception—seeing reality from God's perspective rather than from street-level observation. "Their end" (acharitam, אַחֲרִיתָם) refers to the final outcome, the ultimate destiny of the wicked. What Asaph could not perceive by watching their present prosperity became clear when he considered their eternal destination.

Historical Context

The sanctuary was central to Israel's worship and theology. Here, sacrifices were offered, God's presence dwelt above the mercy seat, and priests ministered before

the LORD. The temple represented heaven on earth—the meeting place between the holy God and sinful humanity.

Within the sanctuary, several elements would have contributed to Asaph's transformed understanding. The sacrificial system demonstrated the seriousness of sin and the need for atonement. The law was read and taught. The community of faith gathered, providing perspective beyond individual experience. Most importantly, God's presence was specially manifested there.

Ancient Israel had no fully developed doctrine of afterlife, yet hints of eternal perspective appear throughout the Psalms (16:10-11, 49:14-15). Asaph's insight into "their end" may include both temporal judgment and ultimate destiny—a theme that would be developed more fully in later revelation.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. What does it mean to 'go into the sanctuary of God' in New Testament terms, and how might this transform our perspective?
2. Why was the sanctuary uniquely suited to provide the understanding Asaph needed?
3. How does considering 'their end' change our evaluation of the present prosperity of the wicked?
4. What spiritual disciplines might serve a similar function to Asaph's sanctuary visit for modern believers?

Interlinear Text

לְאַחֲרִיתָם אָבִיָּה אָלָמָקְדָשִׁי אָלָי מִקְדָשִׁי אָבִיָּה אָלָמָקְדָשִׁי אָלָמָקְדָשִׁי אָלָמָקְדָשִׁי אָלָמָקְדָשִׁי

Additional Cross-References

Luke 12:20 (References God): But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?

Psalms 27:4 (Temple): One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in his temple.

Psalms 77:13 (Temple): Thy way, O God, is in the sanctuary: who is so great a God as our God?

Psalms 119:24 (Parallel theme): Thy testimonies also are my delight and my counsellors.

Psalms 63:2 (Temple): To see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary.

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