

Psalms 73:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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

Analysis

For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. Asaph now identifies the cause of his near-fall: envy triggered by observing wicked people prospering. The Hebrew *qinna* (קִנָּה, "I was envious") denotes jealousy, passionate desire for what another possesses. This emotion, though natural, becomes spiritually dangerous when directed toward the ungodly.

"The foolish" (holelim, הָלֵלִים) derives from a root meaning to boast, rave, or act madly. These are not intellectually deficient people but the morally arrogant—those who live as if God does not exist or does not act. The parallel term "wicked" (resha'im, רָשָׁעִים) confirms the moral rather than intellectual dimension of their foolishness.

"The prosperity" (shalom, שָׁלוֹם) is significant. Shalom means more than wealth—it encompasses wholeness, peace, well-being, security. Asaph observed the wicked enjoying comprehensive flourishing that should, according to covenant theology, belong to the righteous. This apparent reversal of divine justice precipitated his crisis. The verb "saw" (ra'ah) indicates prolonged observation, not a fleeting glance. Asaph studied their prosperity, and his envy grew with each observation.

Historical Context

The problem of wicked prosperity troubled Israel throughout its history. Job's friends assumed suffering indicated sin and prosperity indicated righteousness—a

theology Job's experience refuted. Jeremiah complained: "Wherfore doth the way of the wicked prosper?" (Jeremiah 12:1). Habakkuk questioned why God tolerated injustice (Habakkuk 1:13).

Envy was recognized as particularly destructive in wisdom literature. Proverbs 14:30 warns that "envy is the rottenness of the bones." Proverbs 24:19 commands: "Fret not thyself because of evil men, neither be thou envious at the wicked." The tenth commandment's prohibition against coveting addresses this same spiritual danger.

In the ancient Near East, prosperity was generally viewed as divine favor. Israel's covenant theology reinforced this connection (Deuteronomy 28). When the wicked prospered while the righteous suffered, it seemed to contradict God's revealed character and promises.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. What specific forms does envy of the 'prosperous wicked' take in contemporary life?
2. How does prolonged observation of others' prosperity feed envy, and what disciplines might counteract this?
3. Why is it spiritually dangerous to measure God's goodness by the visible prosperity of others?
4. How does the Hebrew concept of shalom (comprehensive well-being) intensify the problem Asaph faced?

Interlinear Text

אָרָאָה: רָשָׁע יִם שָׁלֹום בְּהוֹלֶל יִם קָנָתִי כִּי
H3588 For I was envious at the foolish the prosperity of the wicked when I saw
H7065 H1984 H7965 H7563 H7200

Additional Cross-References

Job 21:7 (Evil): Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power?

Psalms 37:7 (Evil): Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him: fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass.

Proverbs 23:17 (Parallel theme): Let not thine heart envy sinners: but be thou in the fear of the LORD all the day long.

Jeremiah 12:1 (Evil): Righteous art thou, O LORD, when I plead with thee: yet let me talk with thee of thy judgments: Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously?

Psalms 37:1 (Evil): Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity.

Proverbs 24:1 (Evil): Be not thou envious against evil men, neither desire to be with them.

Proverbs 3:31 (Parallel theme): Envy thou not the oppressor, and choose none of his ways.

James 4:5 (Parallel theme): Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?