

END OF PSALM 73

You are Psalms

Some people think you never get discouraged, but the fact is, when you do, you know where to run. Your prayers are open and honest because you realize that God already knows your heart, He's just waiting to hear you spill it. And when you do, what starts out as heavy ends up becoming a song of praise. You may struggle... and often you do... but each time, you grow in your understanding of God's faithfulness. You're just a song waiting to happen.

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PSALMS (SONGS OF PRAISE)

TRUST
IN THE
LORD *and do good;
dwell in the land and
enjoy safe pasture.*
PSALM 36: 3

PSALM NUMBER: 73

A prayer of the church under grievous persecutions.

1. O God, why hast thou cast us off unto the end? Why is thy wrath enkindled against the sheep of thy pasture?
2. Remember thy congregation, which thou hast possessed from the beginning; the scepter of thy inheritance which thou hast redeemed; Mount Sion in which thou hast dwelt.
3. Lift up thy hands against their pride unto the end: see what things the enemy hath done wickedly in the sanctuary.
4. And they that hate thee have made their boasts, in the midst of thy solemnity. They have set up their ensigns for signs:
5. And they knew not both in the going out, and on the highest top. As with axes in a wood of trees,
6. They have cut down at once the gates thereof: with axe and hatchet they have brought it down.
7. They have set fire to thy sanctuary: they have defiled the dwelling place of thy name on the earth.
8. They said in their heart, the whole kindred of them together: Let us abolish all the festival days of God from the land.
9. Our signs we have not seen, there is now no prophet, and he will know us no more.
10. How long, O God, shall the enemy reproach? Is the adversary to provoke thy name forever?

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11. Why dost thou turn away thy hand? And thy right hand out of the midst of thy bosom forever?
12. But God is our king before ages; he hath wrought salvation in the midst of the earth.
13. Thou by thy strength didst make the sea firm; thou didst crush the heads of the dragons in the waters.
14. Thou hast broken the heads of the dragon: thou hast given him to me meat for the people of the Ethiopians.
15. Thou hast broken up the fountains and the torrents: thou hast dried up the Ethan rivers.
16. Thine is the day, and thine is the night; thou hast made the morning light and the sun.
17. Thou hast made all the borders of the earth: the summer and the spring were formed by thee.
18. Remember this, the enemy hath reproached the Lord: and a foolish people hath provoked thy name.
19. Deliver not up to beasts the souls that confess to thee: and forget not to the end the souls of thy poor.
20. Have regard to thy covenant: for they that are the obscure of the earth have been filled with dwellings of iniquity.
21. Let not the humble be turned away with confusion: the poor and needy shall praise thy name.
22. Arise, O God, judge thy own cause: remember thy reproaches with which the foolish man hath reproached thee all the day.
23. Forget not the voices of thy enemies: the pride of them that hate thee ascendeth continually.

The Psalms are songs of praise and cover a period of about 1000 years, from the time of Moses (ca. 1400 B.C.) to the Israelites' return from exile (ca. 450 B.C.). They deal with selected events of that period and provide us with the thoughts and feelings of those who went through the experiences recorded. After being made a Cardinal by Pope Clement VIII, Saint Robert Bellarmine, prepared for posterity his very own commentary on each of the Psalms. Enclosed are his interpretations on each of the Psalms.

PSALM NUMBER: 73

EXPLANATION OF THE PSALM

1. "O God, why hast thou cast us off unto the end? Why is thy wrath enkindled against the sheep of thy pasture?" The holy Prophet, speaking in the person of the Jewish people, deplores that universal calamity that was inflicted on them by the Gentiles, under King Antiochus, who was called Epiphanes. "O God, why hast thou cast us off," us thy people, "to the end?" As if you were never more to care for or to regard us; "why is thy wrath enkindled," is thy anger excited, "against the sheep of thy pasture?" Against that people you were wont to protect with as much care as a shepherd does his flock. The words, "thou hast cast us off unto the end," do not imply that God, in reality, by a fixed decree, cast off his people forever; but that the people thought he had done so, and were fearful for the consequence; and, therefore, in a pitiable voice, exclaimed, "why have you cast us off forever?" That is, you deal with us as if you had cast us off; for, when he says in a subsequent verse of this same Psalm, "and forget not the souls of thy poor," he shows that he was not at all so sure of their having been cast off.

2. "Remember thy congregation, which thou hast possessed from the beginning, the scepter of thy inheritance which thou has redeemed; Mount Sion in which thou hast

Psalmist had in view. It was of the persecution of Antiochus that such prayer was most appropriate, because he never succeeded in entirely annihilating them as did Nabuchodonosor, Titus, and Vespasian. "Deliver not up to beasts," to cruel men as ferocious as beasts, "the souls that confess to thee;" who worship thee and chant thy praises; "and forget not, to the end, the souls of thy poor;" forget not to defend and deliver the souls of your poor, who daily beg at the gate of your mercy.

20. "Have regard to thy covenant: for they that are the obscure of the earth have been filled with dwellings of iniquity." He brings forward two other arguments to appease God; one from the covenant entered into with the fathers; the other drawn from the iniquity of their adversaries, who, though of the vilest of the vile, had unjustly gotten possession of their mansions. "Have regard to thy covenant." If you will not regard us, regard, at least, thy covenant or testament which you may without fathers, that you would be a God to us, and that you would protect and defend us in the land you gave us; "for they that are the obscure of the earth," an obscure, wretched set of barbarians, "have been filled with dwellings of iniquity; have an abundance of the houses and palaces they have most iniquitously deprived us of.

21. "Let not the humble be turned away with confusion: the poor and needy shall praise thy name." He follows up his prayer, and begs that a prostrate people may not be obliged to retire in confusion and not having their prayer attended to. "Let not the humble be turned away with confusion" at his prayer being rejected; "the poor and the needy shall praise thy name;" that is, those despised by the rich and the proud.

22. "Arise, O God, judge thy own cause: remember thy reproaches with which the foolish man hath reproached thee all the day." He now assigns a fresh reason: because the people's cause is God's cause, the reproaches heaped upon them actually fall on God himself. "Arise, O God, judge thy own cause," defend it; the Hebrew has, plead your own cause; "remember thy reproaches" that are daily heaped upon you by your enemies, this proud ignorant people.

23. "Forget not the voices of thy enemies the pride of them that hate thee ascendeth continually." He concludes by asking God not to forget punishing his enemies, because they do not forget to punish him. Do not let the blasphemies of your enemies go unpunished, for "the pride of them that hate thee, ascendeth continually," the proud voices of your enemies will never cease, but daily ascend from their tongues, like sparks from the furnace of their malignant hearts.

coast of the Arabs, who are also called Ethiopians, and stripped by them; while others say that the crows, who, from their color may be called Ethiopians, fed on the carcasses of the drowned Egyptians; but it matters not which, when it is clear that signal punishment was inflicted on Pharaoh.

15. "Thou has broken up the fountains and the torrents: thou hast dried-up the Ethan rivers." He now describes God's power, who, shortly after made a stream of water to gush from the rock, widened a rivulet to the breadth of a river, and then, dried-up the Jordan to pass the people over to the land of promise. "Thou has broken up the fountains;" you broke the rocks and made fountains and torrents of pure water to issue from them. "Thou hast dried-up the Ethan rivers;" the river Jordan, a very large river, as the word "Ethan" signifies.

16. "Thine is the day, and thine is the night: thou hast made the morning light and the sun." He now passes to the power displayed by God in creation, and as creation comprises two principal divisions, the heavens and the earth, according to Genesis; "in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." He speaks here of the two only, saying, "thine is the day, and thine is the night;" and he assigns a reason for calling them his, when he says, "thou hast made the moon and the sun," the one the light the night, the other the day.

17. "Thou hast made all the borders of the earth: the summer and the spring were formed by thee." He touched upon the creation of heaven by speaking of the light and of the sun; and now he alludes to the creation of the earth, by saying, "thou hast made all the borders of the earth;" you have created the whole earth, even to its remotest bounds, from east to west, from north to south. "The summer and the spring were formed by thee;" you established the changes in the season by virtue of which the earth now conceives, and then brings forth her fruit; and no sooner does she yield her fruit, than, by such changes in the seasons, she is prepared for another yield.

18. "Remember this, the enemy hath reproached the Lord: and a foolish people hath provoked thy name." Having dilated on God's power, he now returns to prayer, asking of God to remember how his enemy blasphemed him, as if he were impotent and infirm. This, and the following verses, seem to elude to the pride of Antiochus, of which Maccabees says, that "he spoke with great pride;" and in 2 Mach. 5, having said that Antiochus "took in his wicked hands the holy vessels, and unworthily handled and profaned them;" he afterwards adds, "so when Antiochus had taken away out of the temple a thousand and eight hundred talents, he went back in all haste to Antioch, thinking through pride, that he might make the land now navigable, and the sea passage on foot; such was the haughtiness of his mind." The Psalmist, therefore, says, "remember this;" remember, O Lord, what I am about to say, "the enemy hath reproached the Lord;" has reproached him with impotence to save his people; "and a foolish people hath provoked thy name," by blaspheming it.

19. "Deliver not up to beasts the souls that confessed to thee: and forget not to the end the souls of thy poor." This verse should decide on Antiochus being the one the

dwelt." They now pray to God not "to cast them off," inasmuch as they are the people he formally brought out of Egypt, formed them into a peculiar congregation, by giving them magistrates, laws, and rites, and, therefore, that it would seem incongruous that he who had so formed and established them should now desert them. "Remember thy congregation," the people you congregated, "which thou hast possessed from the beginning;" who acknowledged no king or Lord before you; you were the first to possess it as its Lord and Master. "The scepter of thy inheritance which thou hast redeemed, Mount Sion, in which thou forever dwells." Another argument to prove it was not right that God should cast them off; because he not only first called them as is congregation together, and possessed these; but he also raised them into a kingdom, turned the Chananeans out of the land of promise for them, and gave the land to them as being his people. "The scepter of thy inheritance which thou hast redeemed." The scepter of the kingdom of the land of promise, which you have acquired by right of war, having ejected the unlawful possessors of it from the land you promised to Abraham and his descendants, the children of Israel. He calls it "the scepter of his inheritance," because God took that scepter, that kingdom of the land of promise as his own, for his inheritance, as it were, to indicate they were his own peculiar people. "Mount Sion, in which thou hast dwelt;" Sion being the capital of the kingdom you have thus chosen.

3. "Lift up thy hands against their pride unto the end: see what things the enemy hath done wickedly in the sanctuary." For the reasons aforesaid, God's people not pray that he may turn his hand against their enemies, and so confound their pride forever, that they would never again dare to rise up against God's servants. The extravagance of Antiochus' pride appears from 1 Mach. 1, where we read, "he proudly entered into the sanctuary;" and in a few verses after, "that he spoke with great pride." "See what things the enemy hath done wickedly in the sanctuary." Assigning a reason for the justice of God's punishing the pride of the enemy, because he had offered grievous injuries to the sanctuary of God, which is most applicable to King Antiochus, who, as we read in Maccabees, "despoiled and profaned the sanctuary."

4. "And they that hate thee have made their boasts, in the midst of thy solemnity. They have set up their ensigns for signs." Antiochus, to whom only this passage can apply, hated the Jews and their God, and the ceremonies of the law, and did everything in his power to induce the Jews to worship idols; and, therefore, to him and his soldiers properly applies the expression, "that they made their boasts," and that like so many barbarians, for such is the force of the word in Hebrew; "they that hate thee," who hated your sacred rites and ceremonies of your law; "in the midst of thy solemnity," who, while public worship was going on in your sanctuary, entered, profaned, and despoiled it, and in triumph carried off the spoils, like so many conquerors after seizing their booty. "They have set up their ensigns for signs." They erected their own banners in the most conspicuous parts of the city, to show they had conquered and taken it.

5. "And they knew not both in the going out, and on the highest top. As with axes in a wood of trees."

6. "They have cut down at once the gates thereof: with axe and hatchet they have brought it down." The words, "and they knew not," should be read as if in a parenthesis; that is, while they were so profaning the sanctuary, they knew not what wrath they were stirring up for themselves. The words, "both in going out, and on the highest top," refer to the fourth verse, showing that their ensigns were most conspicuous, on the highest towers and the most public passages. "As with axes in a wood of trees." He goes on to recount the injuries offered to the city by its enemies. They tumbled its gates, as if they were cutting down so many trees with axes, and that "at once" they were all ready, willing, and egged each other onto the work. "With axe and hatchet they have brought it down;" the very thing we read of King Antiochus, who leveled the gates and walls of the city.

7. "They have set fire to thy sanctuary: they have defiled the dwelling place of thy name on earth." This seems to be the only passage forbidding the application of this Psalm to the persecution of Antiochus, which, however, in my opinion, can be explained in accordance with it; for, though the entire Temple was burnt and razed down by Nabuchodonosor and by Titus, and was not burnt by Antiochus; still the gates of the Temple were burned by him, so we read in 1 Mach. 4, "and they saw the sanctuary desolate and the altar profaned, and the gates burned, and shrubs growing up in the courts, as in a forest or on the mountains, and the chambers adjoining to the Temple thrown down;" and immediately after, in speaking of the renewal of the Temple, he says, "and they renewed the gates and the chambers, and hanged doors upon them." The expression, then, "they have set fire to thy sanctuary," may be understood of a part of it, and not of the entire, which seems likely too, from the following; for, if they had burned the whole of the sanctuary, David could not say, as he does say, in the same verse, "they have defiled the name of thy dwelling place on earth;" for, what had been burned could not be defiled. They burned the gates, then, and they defiled the Temple and the tabernacle, by placing therein the idol of abomination, and sacrificing to it, as we read in Maccabees.

8. "They said in their heart, the whole kindred of them together: let us abolish all the festival days of God from the land." This seems to apply to the pagans, who, in the time of Antiochus, endeavored when all their might to extinguish the religion of the true God, as appears from Maccabees. "They said in their heart:" the whole nation of the Gentiles subject to Antiochus came to a resolution, saying, "let us abolish all the festival days of God from the land;" that is, let us contaminate the sanctuary, fill every place with idols, remove all signs of religion, and thus we will abolish; that is, we will put an end to, and stop all the festivals of God in the land of Israel.

9. "Our signs we have not seen, there is now no prophet: and he will know us no more." He gives us now the expression of a faithful, though desponding people, under such afflictions. These are most applicable to the days of Antiochus, when the old miracles and voice of the prophets were so lost that God would seem to have

deserted his people entirely.

10. "How long, O God, shall the enemy reproach? Is the adversary to provoke thy name forever?" God's people go on to implore God's clemency, that, mindful of them, he may turn his anger on his enemies, who reproached him with infirmity, as if he were not able to save his people. He seems to have Nicanor in view, "who mocked and despised God's people;" and also King Antiochus and King Demetrius, and their generals, who were so hostile to God and his people, as may be seen in the first book of Maccabees

11. "Why dost thou turn away thy hand? And thy right-hand out of the mist of thy bosom forever?" The people having prayed to God to turn his anger against his enemies, they now pray to him to embrace his people, as he was wont to do, and not to exclude his children for the bosom of their Father. Why do you keep your hands to yourself; keep them in your bosom, instead of extending them to embrace your children.

12. "But God is our King before ages; he hath wrought salvation in the midst of the earth." The general explanation of this and the five following verses is the literal one, in which the power of God is explained, both in the case of the children of Israel, who were delivered, as well as the creation of the world; in order to show that he can, if he will, now free the children of Israel from the present calamity. "But God is our King, before ages he hath wrought salvation;" namely, of the Jews, "in the midst of the earth," in the land of promise, to which he introduced them, after delivering them from Pharaoh. "In the midst of the earth;" some interpret this to mean publicly, openly, which I would not condemn. It is true, however, to say, Palestine was "in the midst of the earth;" it was in the midst of the habitable world, then known, being quite contiguous to Europe, Asia, and Africa; and it was for such reason our Savior selected it for the spread of his Gospel, as being the most central place from whence it may be promulgated.

13. "Thou by thy strength didst make the sea firm: thou didst crush the heads of the dragons in the water." He now explains how God accomplished the salvation of the Jews. "Thou by thy strength didst make the sea firm." By your power you made the Red Sea stand up like a wall, to afford a dry passage through to the children of Israel; and by the same power you brought the same waters back in a heap on the heads of the Egyptians, who, like so many dragons, pursued the children of Israel

14. "Thou hast broken their heads of the dragon: thou hast given him to be meat for the people of the Ethiopians." Nearly all commentators say that Pharaoh is alluded to in this verse; for the Hebrew for dragon in this verse, is not the same for it as in the preceding verse; here it implies a great chief, or prince of dragons. Thou hast given him to be meat for the people of the Ethiopians. Some say that upon Pharaoh's being drowned, his kingdom was plundered by the Ethiopians. Some say that the bodies of Pharaoh and his army were cast ashore on the