

Isaiah Series Part 16

Comparison of King Hezekiah with
Asaph in Psalm 73



What Is Known About Asaph (the Author of Psalm 73)?

Asaph as a Historical Figure in David's and Solomon's Courts

In the Old Testament, **Asaph** appears primarily in the historical books and Chronicles as a **Levitical singer, musician, and prophet** in the royal worship system:

A chief musician appointed by David (1 Chr 6:39; 15:16–19; 16:4–7).

Head of an entire musical guild known as the **Asaphites** (1 Chr 25:1–2).

Associated with prophetic inspiration (“Asaph the seer,” 2 Chr 29:30).

His descendants served in temple worship for centuries (Ezra 3:10; Neh 7:44; 11:22).

Asaph appears connected to **cymbals, choirs, and liturgical leadership** in the tabernacle/temple tradition. The chronicler presents him as a **spiritual leader** of the temple musicians and an authoritative figure in Israel's worship life.

Implications of the Psalms of Asaph

The “Psalms of Asaph” (Psalms **50, 73–83**) may have originated in:

- Asaph himself,
- his prophetic/musical school,
- or the later *Asaphite tradition* continuing his theological themes.

Scholars widely recognize that the Asaph psalms reflect **temple theology, communal lament**, and themes of **judgment, justice**, and **the prosperity of the wicked**.

The Nature of the “Asaph Collection”

These psalms share unique features:

- A strong interest in **God’s justice** and the problem of evil.
- The **sanctuary** as a location of revelation.
- A concern for the **covenant faithfulness** of God.
- Historical reflection on Israel’s failures and God’s mercy.
- A prophetic tone: “Thus says the Lord” (Ps 50).

Some scholars see a distinctive **Asaphite theology**, deeply shaped by the **sanctuary** and **prophetic wisdom**.

Scholarly Analysis of Psalm 73

Genre and Structure

Most scholars classify Psalm 73 as:

- **A wisdom psalm** with lament elements (Craigie, Allen, Tate).
- **A reflective testimony psalm** (Brueggemann).
- **A theological journey** from confusion to clarity (Goldingay, Alter).
- **A sanctuary psalm**—revelation occurs “in the sanctuary of God” (v. 17).

Scholarly Analysis of Psalm 73

The Sanctuary as the Place of Revelation

Verse 17—“Then I entered the sanctuary of God; then I perceived their end”—is the theological hinge.

Key perspectives:

Tate (Word Biblical Commentary): The sanctuary mediates divine perspective; it “reorients” the psalmist.

Mays: Revelation at the sanctuary reassures the psalmist of divine order in the universe.

Kidner: The turning point is not intellectual but **relational**—encountering God transforms one’s understanding.

Scholars often note that the Asaph tradition places emphasis on the **cultic space** as the location where God instructs His people.

Big Picture Connection Psalm 73 with Isaiah Chapters 37-39

Psalm 73 and **Isaiah 37–39** both deal with **the collapse of human expectations** and the **reorientation of faith** in the face of overwhelming circumstances.

Psalm 73: internal crisis—envy, doubt, the prosperity of the wicked.

Isaiah 37–39: external crisis—Assyrian threat, looming death, pride, and eventual judgment.

Both narratives present a believer who is **deeply shaken**, who momentarily loses perspective, and who regains clarity only after **coming into the presence of God**.

Shared Themes

1. Crisis That Disrupts Faith

Both the psalmist and Hezekiah face a crisis that creates spiritual disorientation.

Psalm 73

The psalmist nearly stumbles because the wicked flourish while the righteous suffer.
His worldview collapses (vv. 2–3, 13–15).

Hezekiah in Isaiah 37–39

He faces Assyria, the greatest world power (Isa 37), threatening his life and kingdom.

Later he faces his own death (Isa 38).
Then he faces the crisis of pride (Isa 39).

In both cases, the crisis reveals the **limits of human strength** and forces a deeper reliance on God.

Shared Themes

2. Turning Point in the Presence of God

The most striking parallel is that both stories pivot on a **sacred encounter**.

Psalm 73

“Then I entered the sanctuary of God” (v. 17).

There the psalmist receives divine perspective and clarity.

Hezekiah

Isaiah 37: Hezekiah goes to the **temple**, lays Sennacherib’s letter before the Lord, and gains divine perspective.

Isaiah 38: Hezekiah turns his face toward the Lord in prayer.

Isaiah 39: His failure stems from forgetting this perspective.

Both experience a **reorientation through meeting God in His holy place**.

The Danger of Misreading Reality

Both the psalmist and Hezekiah **misinterpret their circumstances** before God corrects their vision.

Psalm 73

Misreads the present prosperity of the wicked.
Feels he has kept his heart pure “in vain.”

Hezekiah

Is tempted to think Assyria is undefeatable.
Later misreads Babylon's envoys as an opportunity (Isa 39), revealing pride and blindness.

Both narratives show that human interpretation apart from God is always inadequate.

Conclusion

In the end, both Psalm 73 and the Hezekiah narratives of Isaiah 37–39 remind readers that clarity, stability, and hope can only be found in the presence of God. Whether the crisis takes the form of internal turmoil over the apparent success of the wicked, as in Psalm 73, or the external pressures of political threat, sickness, and pride, as in Hezekiah's story, both texts demonstrate that human perception is inadequate without divine revelation. Each narrative reaches its turning point only when the believer comes before God—into the sanctuary or into prayer—and receives a renewed perspective shaped by God's character rather than circumstances.