

# **BEDWELL GLOBAL MINISTRIES**

**EXPOSITORY SERMON**

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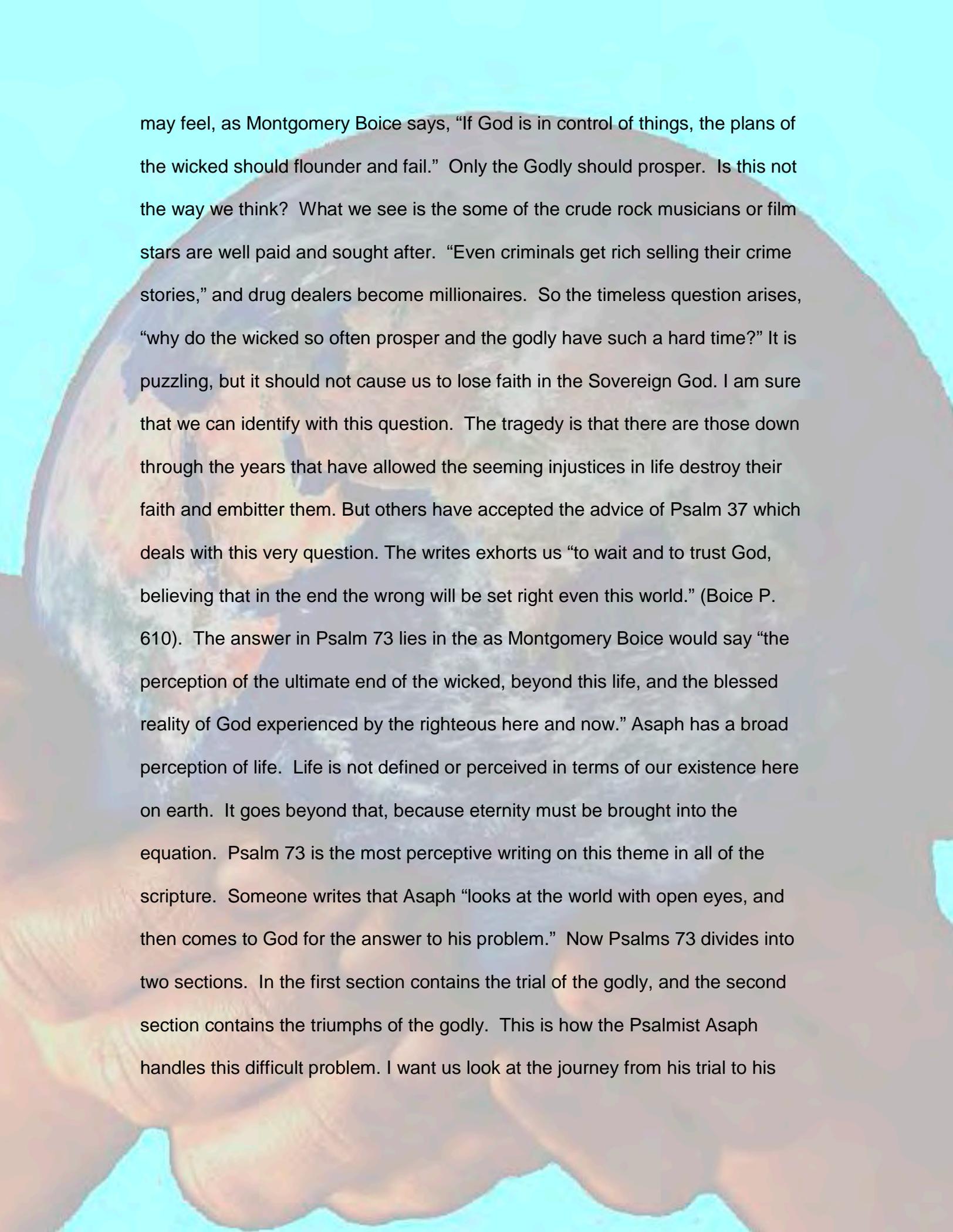
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**FAITH TRIUMPHANT IN THE TRIAL**

**Scripture Reading - Psalm 73.**

## **Introduction**

We generally associate the Psalms with David King of Israel, but he did not write all of them. Psalm 73 was composed by Asaph. Asaph was one of the members of the tribe of Levi whom David put in charge of the worship music that was performed at the Tent of meeting before Solomon built the great temple in Jerusalem (1 Chronicles 6:39). In time he seems to have become the leader of this group, and then the father of an entire clan of temple musicians. David gave some of his Psalms to Asaph, and he and his associates performed these. (1 Chronicles 16:7.) But Asaph also composed Psalms himself, and Psalm 73 is one of them. There is a disarming honesty about the man in this Psalm. He does not understand why the wicked seem to do so well in this world, and the godly do not, surely this should not be, since God directs the moral universe. We



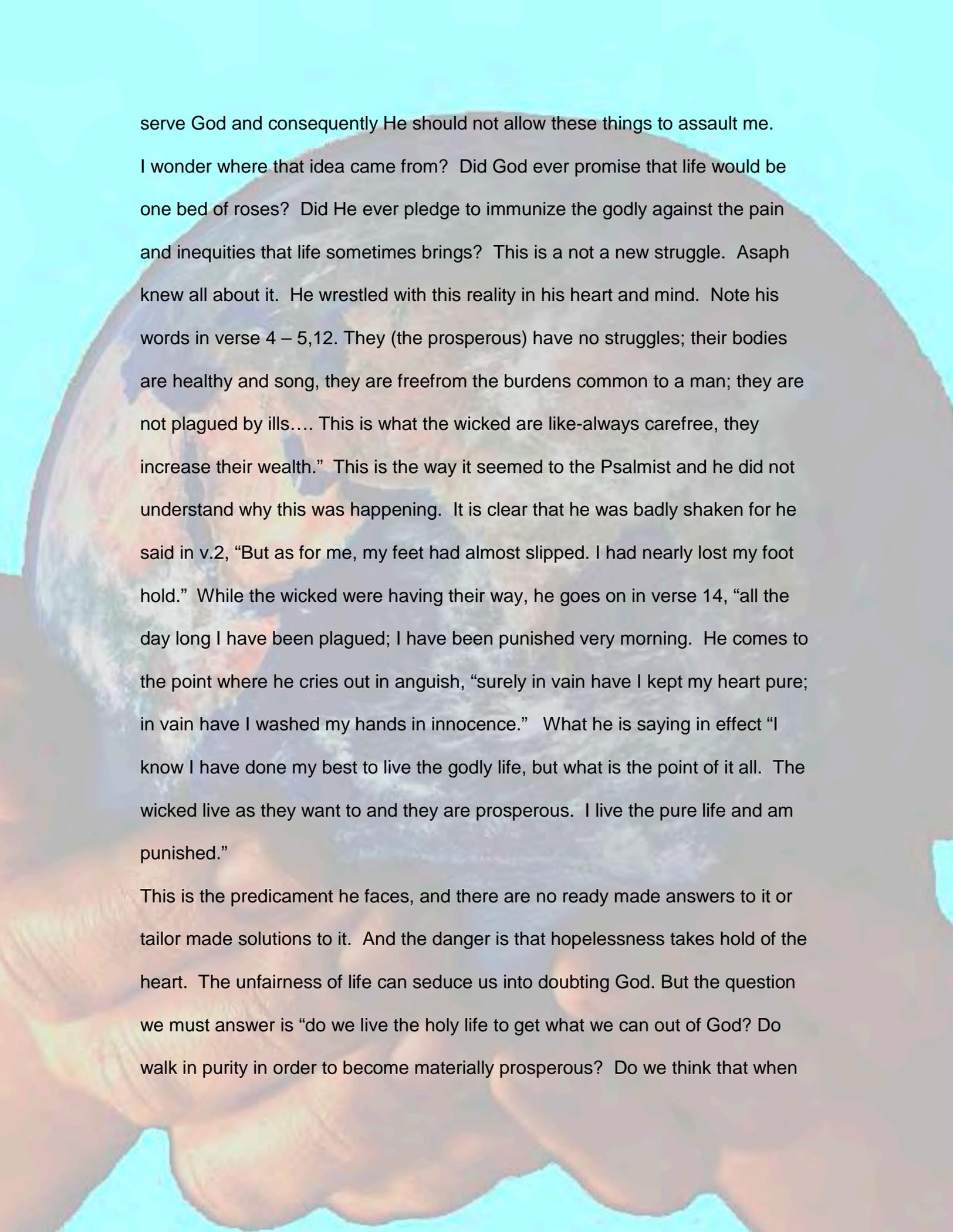
may feel, as Montgomery Boice says, “If God is in control of things, the plans of the wicked should flounder and fail.” Only the Godly should prosper. Is this not the way we think? What we see is the some of the crude rock musicians or film stars are well paid and sought after. “Even criminals get rich selling their crime stories,” and drug dealers become millionaires. So the timeless question arises, “why do the wicked so often prosper and the godly have such a hard time?” It is puzzling, but it should not cause us to lose faith in the Sovereign God. I am sure that we can identify with this question. The tragedy is that there are those down through the years that have allowed the seeming injustices in life destroy their faith and embitter them. But others have accepted the advice of Psalm 37 which deals with this very question. The writes exhorts us “to wait and to trust God, believing that in the end the wrong will be set right even this world.” (Boice P. 610). The answer in Psalm 73 lies in the as Montgomery Boice would say “the perception of the ultimate end of the wicked, beyond this life, and the blessed reality of God experienced by the righteous here and now.” Asaph has a broad perception of life. Life is not defined or perceived in terms of our existence here on earth. It goes beyond that, because eternity must be brought into the equation. Psalm 73 is the most perceptive writing on this theme in all of the scripture. Someone writes that Asaph “looks at the world with open eyes, and then comes to God for the answer to his problem.” Now Psalms 73 divides into two sections. In the first section contains the trial of the godly, and the second section contains the triumphs of the godly. This is how the Psalmist Asaph handles this difficult problem. I want us look at the journey from his trial to his

triumph. In verses 1-16 you will find that he is disturbed at,

### **1. HIS DOUBTS BECAUSE OF THE INEQUITY OR INJUSTICES OF LIFE.**

**Psalm 73:1-16.** In the first 16 verses of this Psalm, the Psalmist is haunted by doubt; indeed he is plagued by it. These doubts were a result of the unfairness of life. All about him there were inequities and injustices that bothered him. Note,

**a. The Realities of Life that Concerned Him. Psalm 73:1-13. There were realities with which his faith had to wrestle.** It is one thing to theorize about faith and another thing to exercise it. It is one thing to speculate on how to live the triumphant life, but it is an entirely different thing to live out that theory or to test what we believe. It is one thing to believe that God is good and that He is good to his people, but it is an entirely different thing to hold on to that knowledge, when God seems to have disappeared in the maze of confusing and painful circumstances, and when injustices take over and life's inequities overwhelm us. In case you do not know what I mean let me paint a picture for you. "Your neighbors never enter the doors of the church or give a dime to God's work, yet they receive a promotion and a big raise. You go to church three times a week and support God's work sacrificially and are passed over for promotion. Your co-worker laughs at God and ridicules the gospel yet he is healthy as a horse. You live for God and stay sick. These are some of the realities of life that you will face and they can become the reason for bitterness and doubt in God's existence and goodness. So often it seems that "evil men do everything wrong and everything right happens to them." How can this be? This is not the way it should be. I'm living the good life therefore good things should happen to me. I

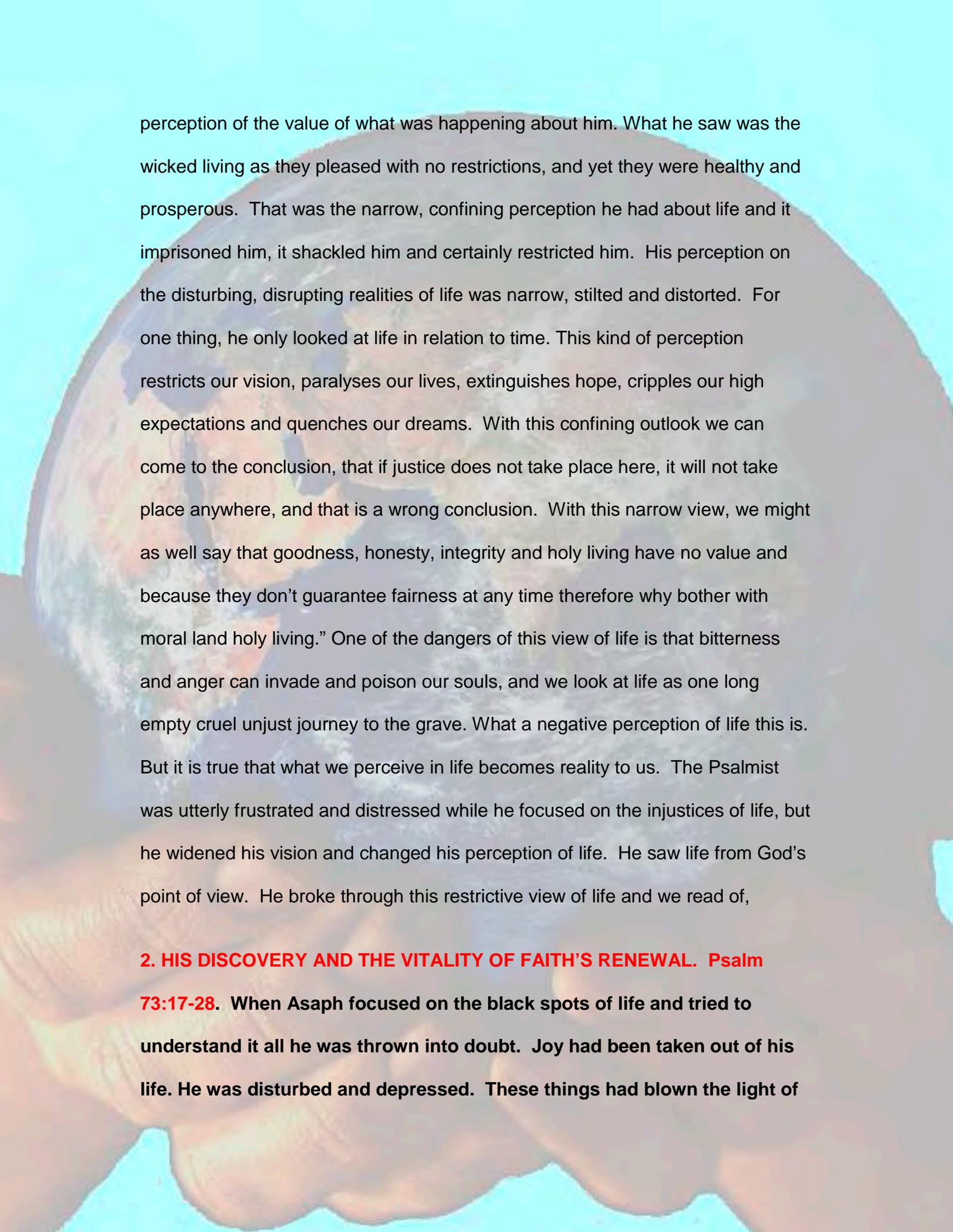


serve God and consequently He should not allow these things to assault me. I wonder where that idea came from? Did God ever promise that life would be one bed of roses? Did He ever pledge to immunize the godly against the pain and inequities that life sometimes brings? This is a not a new struggle. Asaph knew all about it. He wrestled with this reality in his heart and mind. Note his words in verse 4 – 5,12. They (the prosperous) have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong, they are free from the burdens common to a man; they are not plagued by ill.... This is what the wicked are like-always carefree, they increase their wealth.” This is the way it seemed to the Psalmist and he did not understand why this was happening. It is clear that he was badly shaken for he said in v.2, “But as for me, my feet had almost slipped. I had nearly lost my foothold.” While the wicked were having their way, he goes on in verse 14, “all the day long I have been plagued; I have been punished very morning. He comes to the point where he cries out in anguish, “surely in vain have I kept my heart pure; in vain have I washed my hands in innocence.” What he is saying in effect “I know I have done my best to live the godly life, but what is the point of it all. The wicked live as they want to and they are prosperous. I live the pure life and am punished.”

This is the predicament he faces, and there are no ready made answers to it or tailor made solutions to it. And the danger is that hopelessness takes hold of the heart. The unfairness of life can seduce us into doubting God. But the question we must answer is “do we live the holy life to get what we can out of God? Do we walk in purity in order to become materially prosperous? Do we think that when

we do this, that God owes it to us to make life easy? Or do we serve God because in the long run it is the redemptive thing to do, and the right action to take because it is good for us? When we are tempted to go the route of bitterness, we need ask ourselves the question "Was there justice when Barrabus the robber was set free and the Son of God, the incarnation of goodness, compassion, holiness and integrity, the one, who harmed no one, was put to death on a Roman cross? What this just?- Was this fair? - Was it right? Was there justice on the cross, when a man so innocent, so righteous, so holy, so self-giving was nailed there in humiliation and shame, His nakedness exposed to the world? While King Herod in his wickedness still sat on his comfortable throne, wielding his corrupt power. Was this fair? Was this just? Life is unfair. There is a lot of injustice in our world, but what has this to do with God? One has written "No one is immune from feelings of injustice. Life is not fair, but let us not mix up life with God. God is not the source of injustice. God is fair! God is good! It is when we mix up the unfairness of life with God that doubts tend to plague us. Immediately something does wrong, and inequity takes over, the mind of the ungodly person blames God. He never gives God a thought in everyday run of things when things are going well, but when unfairness comes his way he points an accusing finger at God. Often it is the only time he mentions the name of God. This what was beginning to happen in the mind of Asaph, and he was developing,

**b. Perspective of Life that Confined him. Psalm 73:3-14.** The words of Asaph in the first section of the Psalm we see that Asaph had false or warped



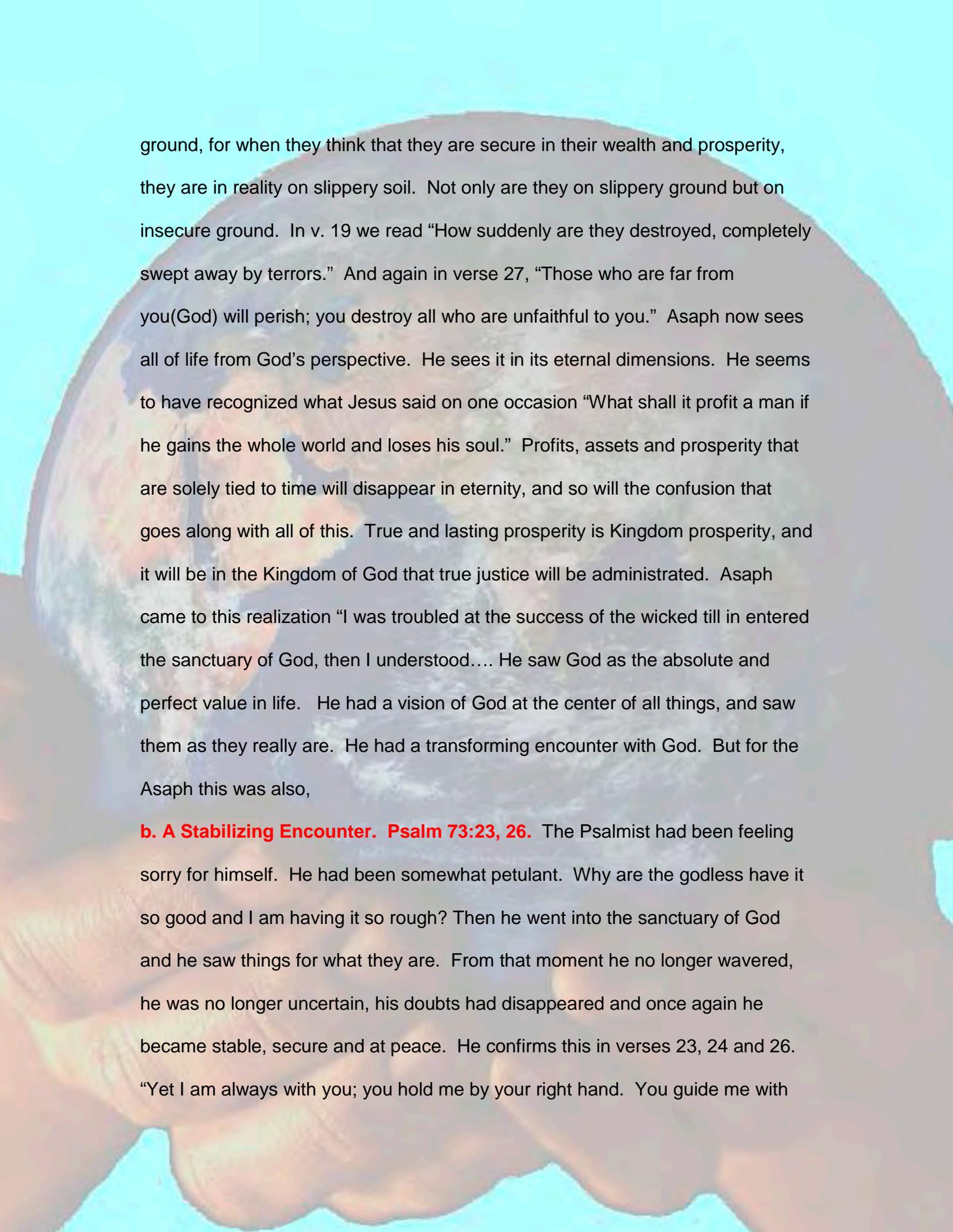
perception of the value of what was happening about him. What he saw was the wicked living as they pleased with no restrictions, and yet they were healthy and prosperous. That was the narrow, confining perception he had about life and it imprisoned him, it shackled him and certainly restricted him. His perception on the disturbing, disrupting realities of life was narrow, stilted and distorted. For one thing, he only looked at life in relation to time. This kind of perception restricts our vision, paralyses our lives, extinguishes hope, cripples our high expectations and quenches our dreams. With this confining outlook we can come to the conclusion, that if justice does not take place here, it will not take place anywhere, and that is a wrong conclusion. With this narrow view, we might as well say that goodness, honesty, integrity and holy living have no value and because they don't guarantee fairness at any time therefore why bother with moral and holy living." One of the dangers of this view of life is that bitterness and anger can invade and poison our souls, and we look at life as one long empty cruel unjust journey to the grave. What a negative perception of life this is. But it is true that what we perceive in life becomes reality to us. The Psalmist was utterly frustrated and distressed while he focused on the injustices of life, but he widened his vision and changed his perception of life. He saw life from God's point of view. He broke through this restrictive view of life and we read of,

## **2. HIS DISCOVERY AND THE VITALITY OF FAITH'S RENEWAL. Psalm**

**73:17-28.** When Asaph focused on the black spots of life and tried to understand it all he was thrown into doubt. Joy had been taken out of his life. He was disturbed and depressed. These things had blown the light of

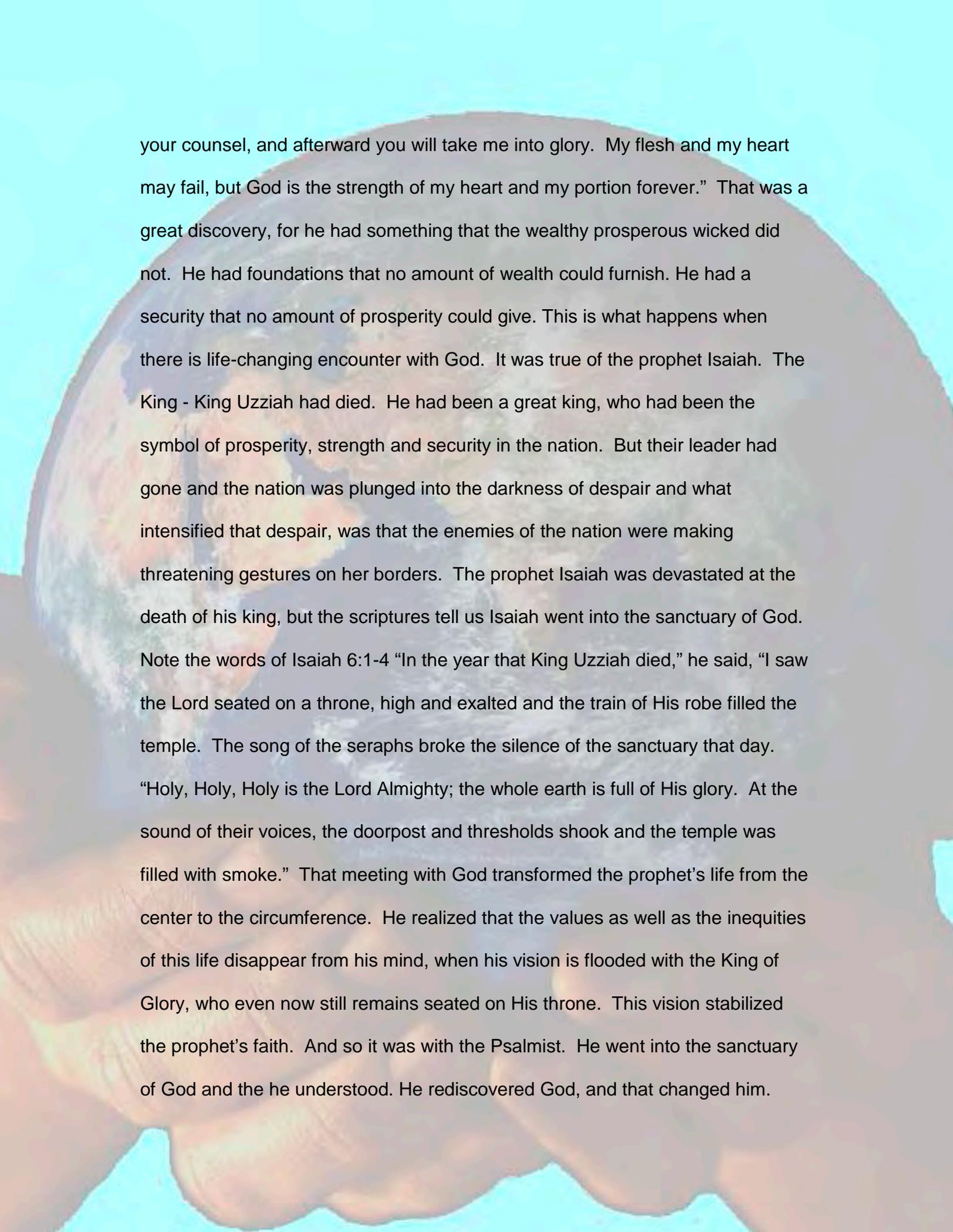
hope from his heart and mind. There was sense of despair in his words until he says in verse 17. "I tried to understand all this and it was oppressive to me, till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny." When he entered into the presence of God he had

**a. A Transforming Encounter with God. Psalm 73:17-28.** When this transformation took place in his heart and mind, his whole perspective changes. Just as he was about to be swept away by his doubts, he had a transforming encounter with God. He was in the presence of God, and then he understood the final destiny of the prosperous wicked. His doubts were taking hold of him until he went into the sanctuary of God. There is a suggestion that in this moment he remembered that wickedness did not have a place with a holy God. God does not tolerate sin. Asaph remembered that "the temple established in Israel as an act of God's mercy, reminds him of God's love." When he encountered God in the holy place, he was in the presence of one who does everything perfectly, including the implementation of justice. He sees the unfairness about him in the light of eternity and with God's perspective, and that gives to him a different perspective on life. Rev Clements pastor of the Eden Baptist church in Cambridge England ties in this transformed perspective to worship. Asaph went into the sanctuary to worship. True worship puts God at the center of our vision. This is vitally important because it is only when God is at the center of our vision that we see things as they really are." Note what the Asaph says v.18, "Surely you place them (The prosperous wicked) on slippery ground; you cast them down to ruin." He now perceived these people to be on slippery



ground, for when they think that they are secure in their wealth and prosperity, they are in reality on slippery soil. Not only are they on slippery ground but on insecure ground. In v. 19 we read “How suddenly are they destroyed, completely swept away by terrors.” And again in verse 27, “Those who are far from you(God) will perish; you destroy all who are unfaithful to you.” Asaph now sees all of life from God’s perspective. He sees it in its eternal dimensions. He seems to have recognized what Jesus said on one occasion “What shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his soul.” Profits, assets and prosperity that are solely tied to time will disappear in eternity, and so will the confusion that goes along with all of this. True and lasting prosperity is Kingdom prosperity, and it will be in the Kingdom of God that true justice will be administrated. Asaph came to this realization “I was troubled at the success of the wicked till I entered the sanctuary of God, then I understood.... He saw God as the absolute and perfect value in life. He had a vision of God at the center of all things, and saw them as they really are. He had a transforming encounter with God. But for the Asaph this was also,

**b. A Stabilizing Encounter. Psalm 73:23, 26.** The Psalmist had been feeling sorry for himself. He had been somewhat petulant. Why are the godless have it so good and I am having it so rough? Then he went into the sanctuary of God and he saw things for what they are. From that moment he no longer wavered, he was no longer uncertain, his doubts had disappeared and once again he became stable, secure and at peace. He confirms this in verses 23, 24 and 26. “Yet I am always with you; you hold me by your right hand. You guide me with



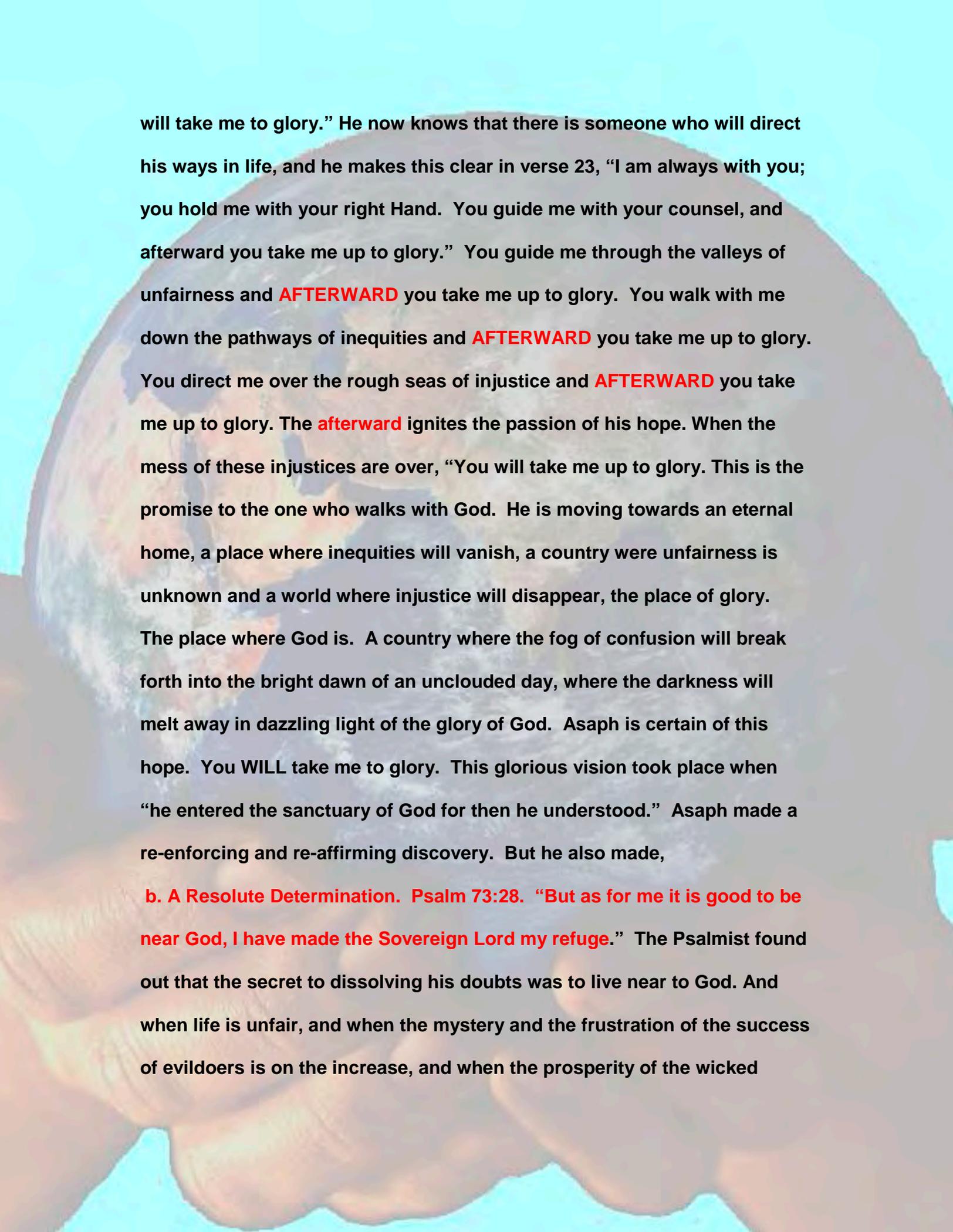
your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.” That was a great discovery, for he had something that the wealthy prosperous wicked did not. He had foundations that no amount of wealth could furnish. He had a security that no amount of prosperity could give. This is what happens when there is life-changing encounter with God. It was true of the prophet Isaiah. The King - King Uzziah had died. He had been a great king, who had been the symbol of prosperity, strength and security in the nation. But their leader had gone and the nation was plunged into the darkness of despair and what intensified that despair, was that the enemies of the nation were making threatening gestures on her borders. The prophet Isaiah was devastated at the death of his king, but the scriptures tell us Isaiah went into the sanctuary of God. Note the words of Isaiah 6:1-4 “In the year that King Uzziah died,” he said, “I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted and the train of His robe filled the temple. The song of the seraphs broke the silence of the sanctuary that day. “Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of His glory. At the sound of their voices, the doorpost and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.” That meeting with God transformed the prophet’s life from the center to the circumference. He realized that the values as well as the inequities of this life disappear from his mind, when his vision is flooded with the King of Glory, who even now still remains seated on His throne. This vision stabilized the prophet’s faith. And so it was with the Psalmist. He went into the sanctuary of God and the he understood. He rediscovered God, and that changed him.

Finally note,

**3. HIS DECISION AND THE PRIORITY OF FAITH'S PROMISE. Psalm 73:17-**

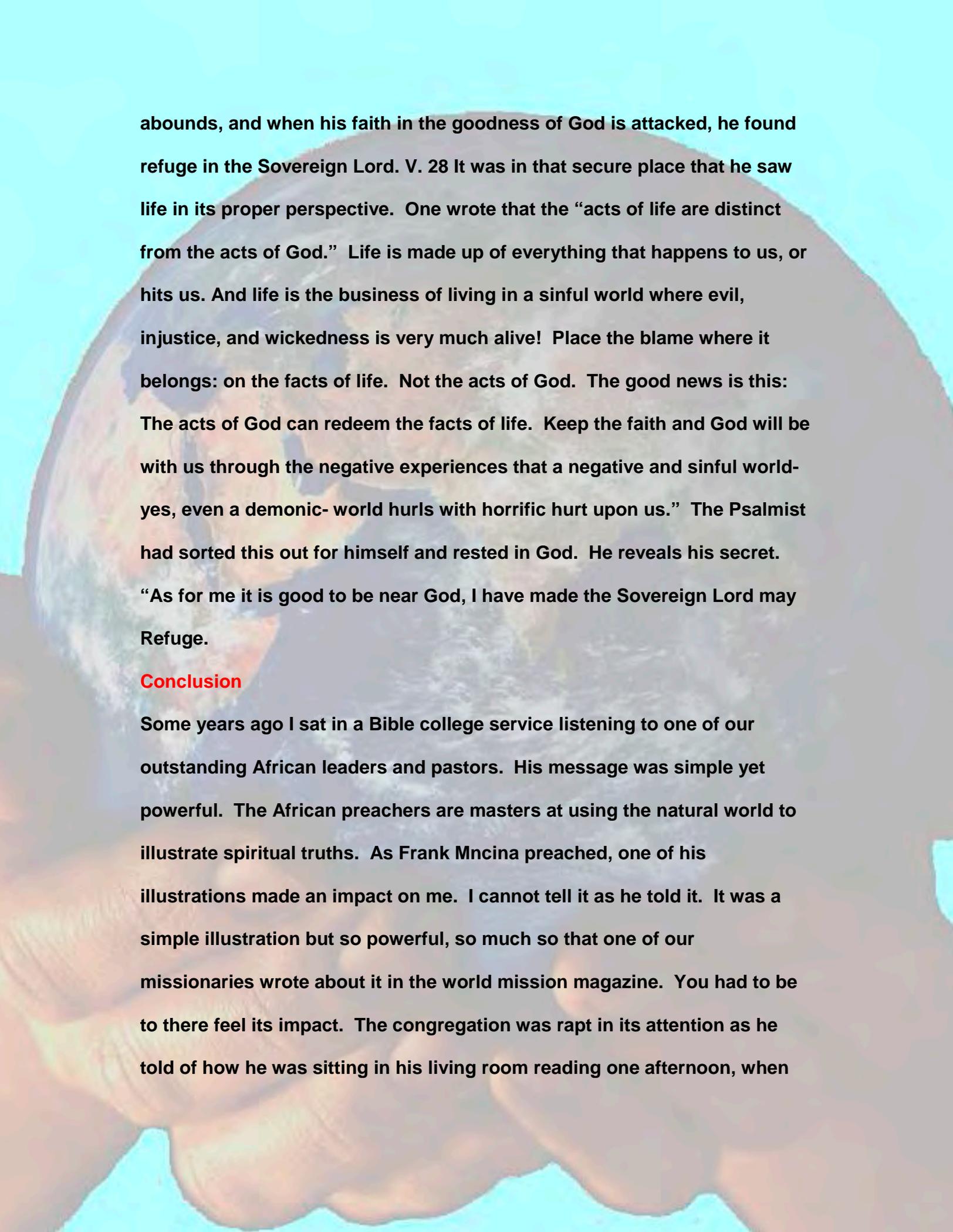
**28.** Having got his perception of life into a proper balanced perspective, he declares his decision on what his priorities will be. They are simple yet clear. And they are summed up in verse 28. "But as for me, it is good to be near God. I have made the Sovereign Lord my refuge; I will tell of all your deeds." This was a personal decision. "As for me." It is as though he had considered all the options open to him and then made his choice. "I have made the Sovereign Lord my refuge." My security is not founded on the shifting sands of prosperity, but on the solid rock of the Sovereignty of God. The decision he made was the result of,

**a. A Re-affirming Discovery. Psalm 73:24-26.** Asaph discovered where true prosperity lay. In verses 25-26 he says "Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever." This man having renewed his faith and vision of God in the sanctuary, came to the realization that the injustices, the inequities or the unfairness of life are seasonal, they transient and are passing us by. God has become the center of all that he is. That is why he becomes aware that there is a bright hope at the end of life's dark tunnel, and he is not going to allow the black spots in life to embitter or destroy his faith. In verse 24 he expresses that hope in significant words, "You guide me with your counsel and afterwards you



will take me to glory.” He now knows that there is someone who will direct his ways in life, and he makes this clear in verse 23, “I am always with you; you hold me with your right Hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you take me up to glory.” You guide me through the valleys of unfairness and **AFTERWARD** you take me up to glory. You walk with me down the pathways of inequities and **AFTERWARD** you take me up to glory. You direct me over the rough seas of injustice and **AFTERWARD** you take me up to glory. The **afterward** ignites the passion of his hope. When the mess of these injustices are over, “You will take me up to glory. This is the promise to the one who walks with God. He is moving towards an eternal home, a place where inequities will vanish, a country where unfairness is unknown and a world where injustice will disappear, the place of glory. The place where God is. A country where the fog of confusion will break forth into the bright dawn of an unclouded day, where the darkness will melt away in dazzling light of the glory of God. Asaph is certain of this hope. You WILL take me to glory. This glorious vision took place when “he entered the sanctuary of God for then he understood.” Asaph made a re-enforcing and re-affirming discovery. But he also made,

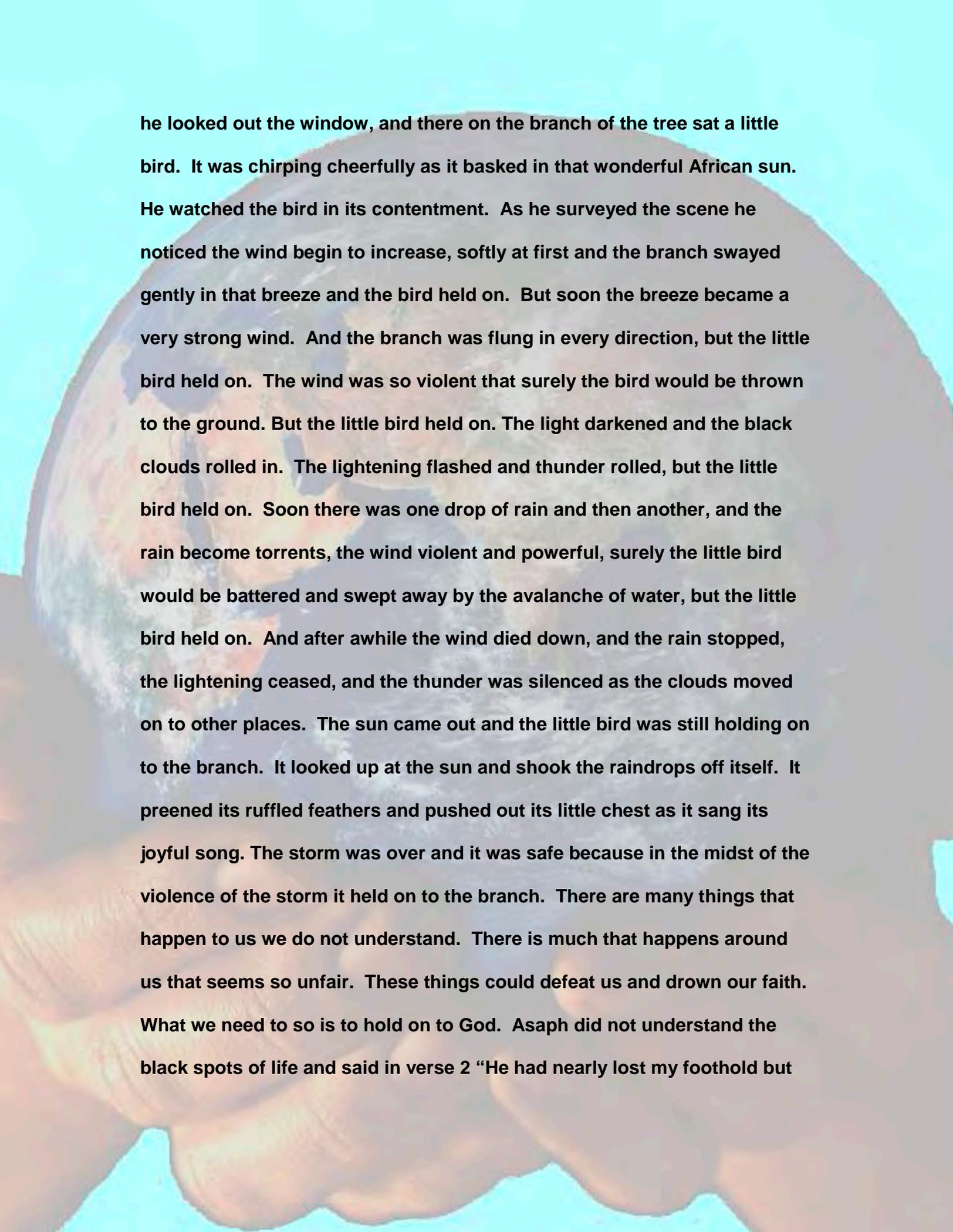
**b. A Resolute Determination. Psalm 73:28. “But as for me it is good to be near God, I have made the Sovereign Lord my refuge.”** The Psalmist found out that the secret to dissolving his doubts was to live near to God. And when life is unfair, and when the mystery and the frustration of the success of evildoers is on the increase, and when the prosperity of the wicked



abounds, and when his faith in the goodness of God is attacked, he found refuge in the Sovereign Lord. V. 28 It was in that secure place that he saw life in its proper perspective. One wrote that the “acts of life are distinct from the acts of God.” Life is made up of everything that happens to us, or hits us. And life is the business of living in a sinful world where evil, injustice, and wickedness is very much alive! Place the blame where it belongs: on the facts of life. Not the acts of God. The good news is this: The acts of God can redeem the facts of life. Keep the faith and God will be with us through the negative experiences that a negative and sinful world-yes, even a demonic- world hurls with horrific hurt upon us.” The Psalmist had sorted this out for himself and rested in God. He reveals his secret. “As for me it is good to be near God, I have made the Sovereign Lord my Refuge.

### **Conclusion**

Some years ago I sat in a Bible college service listening to one of our outstanding African leaders and pastors. His message was simple yet powerful. The African preachers are masters at using the natural world to illustrate spiritual truths. As Frank Mncina preached, one of his illustrations made an impact on me. I cannot tell it as he told it. It was a simple illustration but so powerful, so much so that one of our missionaries wrote about it in the world mission magazine. You had to be there to feel its impact. The congregation was rapt in its attention as he told of how he was sitting in his living room reading one afternoon, when



he looked out the window, and there on the branch of the tree sat a little bird. It was chirping cheerfully as it basked in that wonderful African sun. He watched the bird in its contentment. As he surveyed the scene he noticed the wind begin to increase, softly at first and the branch swayed gently in that breeze and the bird held on. But soon the breeze became a very strong wind. And the branch was flung in every direction, but the little bird held on. The wind was so violent that surely the bird would be thrown to the ground. But the little bird held on. The light darkened and the black clouds rolled in. The lightening flashed and thunder rolled, but the little bird held on. Soon there was one drop of rain and then another, and the rain become torrents, the wind violent and powerful, surely the little bird would be battered and swept away by the avalanche of water, but the little bird held on. And after awhile the wind died down, and the rain stopped, the lightening ceased, and the thunder was silenced as the clouds moved on to other places. The sun came out and the little bird was still holding on to the branch. It looked up at the sun and shook the raindrops off itself. It preened its ruffled feathers and pushed out its little chest as it sang its joyful song. The storm was over and it was safe because in the midst of the violence of the storm it held on to the branch. There are many things that happen to us we do not understand. There is much that happens around us that seems so unfair. These things could defeat us and drown our faith. What we need to so is to hold on to God. Asaph did not understand the black spots of life and said in verse 2 “He had nearly lost my foothold but

**when he went into the sanctuary of God he understood. God put a balanced perspective into his life. Faith in his God guaranteed victory in the trial.**

