

PSALMS

Chapter 37

Fret not yourself because of evildoers; be not envious of wrongdoers! ²For they will soon fade like the grass and wither like the green herb. ³Trust in the LORD, and do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness. ⁴Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart. ⁵Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him, and he will act. ⁶He will bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday. ⁷Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices! ⁸Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath! Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil. ⁹For the evildoers shall be cut off, but those who wait for the LORD shall inherit the land. ¹⁰In just a little while, the wicked will be no more; though you look carefully at his place, he will not be there. ¹¹But the meek shall inherit the land and delight themselves in abundant peace. ¹²The wicked plots against the righteous and gnashes his teeth at him, ¹³but the Lord laughs at the wicked, for he sees that his day is coming. ¹⁴The wicked draw the sword and bend their bows to bring down the poor and needy, to slay those whose way is upright; ¹⁵their sword shall enter their own heart, and their bows shall be broken. ¹⁶Better is the little that the righteous has than the abundance of many wicked. ¹⁷For the arms of the wicked shall be broken, but the LORD upholds the righteous. ¹⁸The LORD knows the days of the blameless, and their heritage will remain forever; ¹⁹they are not put to shame in evil times; in the days of famine they have abundance. ²⁰But the wicked will perish; the enemies of the LORD are like the glory of the pastures; they vanish—like smoke they vanish away. ²¹The wicked borrows but does not pay back, but the righteous is generous and gives; ²²for those blessed by the LORD shall inherit the land, but those cursed by him shall be cut off. ²³The steps of a man are established by the LORD, when he delights in his way; ²⁴though he fall, he shall not be cast headlong, for the LORD upholds his hand. ²⁵I have been young, and now am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken or his children begging for bread. ²⁶He is ever lending generously, and his children become a blessing. ²⁷Turn away from evil and do good; so shall you dwell forever. ²⁸For the LORD loves justice; he will not forsake his saints. They are preserved forever, but the children of the wicked shall be cut off. ²⁹The righteous shall inherit the land and dwell upon it forever. ³⁰The mouth of the righteous utters wisdom, and his tongue speaks justice. ³¹The law of his God is in his heart; his steps do not slip. ³²The wicked watches for the righteous and seeks to put him to death. ³³The LORD will not abandon him to his power or let him be condemned when he is brought to trial. ³⁴Wait for the LORD and keep his way, and he will exalt you to inherit the land; you will look on when the wicked are cut off. ³⁵I have seen a wicked, ruthless man, spreading himself like a green laurel tree. ³⁶But he passed away, and behold, he was no more; though I sought him, he could not be found. ³⁷Mark the blameless and behold the upright, for there is a future for the man of peace. ³⁸But transgressors shall be altogether destroyed; the future of the wicked shall be cut off. ³⁹The salvation of the righteous is from the LORD; he is their stronghold in the time of trouble. ⁴⁰The LORD helps them and delivers them; he delivers them from the wicked and saves them, because they take refuge in him.

Ps 37 Instruction in godly wisdom. (For other “wisdom” psalms see 34:8–22; 49; 112; others closely related are Ps 1; 73; 91; 92:6–9, 12–15; 111; 119; 127–128; 133; see Introduction to Proverbs: Wisdom Literature.) This psalm’s dominant theme is related to the contrast between the wicked and the righteous reflected in Ps 36. The central issue addressed is: Who will “inherit the

land” (vv. 9, 11, 22, 29), i.e., live on to enjoy the blessings of the Lord in the promised land? Will the wicked, who plot (v. 12), scheme (vv. 7, 32), default on debts (v. 21), use raw power to gain advantage (v. 14) and seem thereby to flourish (vv. 7, 16, 35)? Or will the righteous, who trust in the Lord (vv. 3, 5, 7, 34) and are humble (v. 11), blameless (vv. 18, 37), generous (vv. 21, 26), upright (v. 37) and peaceable (v. 37), and from whose mouth is heard the moral wisdom that reflects meditation on God’s law (vv. 30–31)? For a similar characterization of the wicked see 10:2–11; 73:4–12. For a similar characterization of the righteous see Ps 112. For a similar statement concerning the transitoriness of the wicked see Ps 49; 73:18–20. Structurally, in this alphabetic acrostic, two verses are devoted to each letter of the alphabet, though with some irregularity. The main theme is developed in vv. 1–11, then further elaborated in the rest of the psalm. The whole is framed by statements contrasting the brief career of the wicked (vv. 1–2) and the Lord’s sustaining help of the righteous (vv. 39–40). (CSB)

Acrostic poem, with two verses for each letter of the alphabet (irregular). This psalm provides teaching and comfort in the manner of Proverbs. It reconciles the tension between the prosperity of the wicked and the slander of the righteous (cf Ps 36). The crux of the poem is that leaders fail to trust in the Lord (cf vv 3–5, 7, 34, 39). (TLSB)

Format: Vv 1–2, evildoers fade away; vv 3–4, trust the Lord; vv 5–6, He will act; v 7, wait patiently; vv 8–9, don’t get angry; vv 10–11, wicked and meek contrasted; vv 12–13, the Lord laughs at the wicked; vv 14–15, wicked attack; vv 16–17, wicked and righteous contrasted; vv 18–19, blameless remain forever; v 20, wicked vanish; vv 21–22, wicked and righteous contrasted; vv 23–24, the Lord upholds the righteous; vv 25–26, the righteous and his children; vv 27–29, the righteous are preserved; vv 30–31, the righteous described; vv 32–33, the Lord guards the righteous; v 34, appeal for patience; vv 35–36, the wicked passed away; vv 37–38, future of the blameless and the wicked; vv 39–40, the Lord delivers. (TLSB)

37:1–2 It is easy for believers to be frustrated when they see the ungodly prospering in spite of their sins. Why do drug pushers and pornographers get rich? If believers can get away with sin, what is the use of being good? This seeming injustice may tempt the believer to say, “I might as well act like the wicked and get what I can for myself.” The psalmist warns against this folly by reminding us how temporary the happiness and the prosperity of the ungodly are. Even if they manage to escape the consequences of their sins throughout this life, the longest life is shorter than the life-span of a summer plant in comparison with the eternity of anguish which will follow for the wicked. (PBC)

37:1 *fret not...not envious* – The problem and the answer (cf Pr 24:19) (TLSB)

To fret or envy would be a weakness of faith, and so the psalm will call on the people of God to trust in him and live faithfully. (A Commentary of the Psalms - Ross)

evil doers...wrongdoers – People who plot, scheme, default on debts, use political power to gain advantage and thus seem to flourish. “God puts His saints to work in various ways and often holds back the rewards of works-righteousness. He does this so that they may learn not to trust in their own righteousness and may learn to seek God’s will rather than the rewards. This can be seen with Job, Christ, and other saints. And many psalms teach us about this” (Ap V 77). (TLSB)

37:2 *fade...wither* – Vegetation in the Holy Land dies quickly and can be used as fuel (cf Mt 3:10). Aug: “For now it is the season of winter. Your glory does not as yet appear. But if your love has but a deep root, like that of many trees during winter, the frost passes away, the summer

(that is, the Day of Judgment) will come.... The root is within; where our root is, there is our life also, for there our love is fixed. And your life is hid with Christ in God” (NPNF 1 8:91). Cf Col 3:1. (TLSB)

The reason for this admonition is that the wicked are transitory – they have nothing that will last. (A Commentary of the Psalms - Ross)

37:3 *trust in the Lord* – Before Christians attempt to make sense out of the moral chaos they see in the world around them, they should remind themselves of their basic relationship with God. Since he has demonstrated his goodness and love in so many ways, above all in giving his only Son to be their Savior, they should have confidence in the Lord and should continue to obey him, even when they have trouble understanding the unfairness they see in the world. (PBC)

Leave things in God’s hands as you perform your normal functions. (TLSB)

The idea is that the believers submit to the will of the Lord and trust him to sort out the inequities and conflicts of life. Their faith will be evidence by their preoccupation with doing what is in harmony with God’s will. (A Commentary of the Psalms - Ross)

befriend faithfulness – Despite persecution, stand fast where God has placed you and fulfill your calling. (TLSB)

They are to dwell in the land and feed on his faithfulness. (A Commentary of the Psalms - Ross)

37:4 *delight* – As explained in Psalm 1, if the righteous delight in the Lord, then their petitions will be in harmony with his will. (A Commentary of the Psalms - Ross)

heart - Aug: “Distinguish the ‘desires of your heart’ from the desires of your flesh; distinguish as much as you can” (NPNF 1 8:92). “God wishes to give you everything exceedingly and abundantly according to your heart’s desire. He who despises and casts this promise to the winds is not worthy ever to hear a word about God” (LC I 166). (TLSB)

37:5 *Commit* – Cast your burden from yourself and upon Him (cf 1Pt 5:7). We pray, and He listens and answers, though He may delay. (TLSB)

The original says, “Roll your way,” the figure being: dislodge the burden from your shoulders and lay it on God, who has bidden you follow this course. (Leupold)

37:6 *righteousness ... justice*. That is, righteousness-and-justice. (CSB)

How he will act is the expectation of the faith: he will bring forth their-righteousness and their justice “like the light” and “like the noonday.” Their righteousness and faithfulness will triumph over the world and its grim prospects. (A Commentary of the Psalms - Ross)

37:7 *be still* – Quiet waiting for the Lord’s action. (TLSB)

The idea of being still is a calm resignation that leaves itself in the hands of God; the idea of waiting patiently is the expectation of God’s intervention. (A Commentary of the Psalms - Ross)

fret not – Aug: “The ‘way of the ungodly’ is but a transitory happiness.... Its termination leads to the pit of hell. Now, your way is narrow; and ‘few there be’ that enter in through it: but into how ample a field it comes at the last, you ought to consider” (NPNF 1 8:93). (TLSB)

37:8 *anger ... wrath*. Evidence of fretting over the wicked’s prosperity, gained to the disadvantage of and even at the expense of the righteous. (CSB)

To live with intense vexation and jealousy can lead to anger, and anger over the wrong things will produce acts that are like those of the evil-doers, or reprisals that use tactics just as evil. (A Commentary of the Psalms - Ross)

37:9 *those who wait for the Lord* – Waiting does not mean doing nothing. Rather, believers should continue to fulfill their present calling until the Lord presents a new opportunity in His time. E.g., David knew he would be king but had to wait (1Sm 16). (TLSB)

Note Psalm 25:3 Though God’s child requests many things from God in prayer, God acts in His own time. David waits for God to answer, but he has confident hope. (TLSB)

inherit the land – Receive from the Lord secure entitlement (for them and their children) to the promised land as the created and redeemed sphere and bountiful source of provision for the life of God’s people. Those who hope in the Lord—i.e., trustfully look to him to bestow life and its blessings as a gift—will inherit the land, not those who apart from God and by evil means try to take possession of it and its wealth (see vv. 11, 22, 29; cf. Jos 7). (CSB)

Hbr *yarash*, a chief blessing of the covenant. (TLSB)

37:10 *A little while* – Shortness of time is here a figure for certainty of event (see 58:9; Job 20:5–11; Hag 2:6). (CSB)

God will punish the ungodly in his own good time. Often the schemes of the wicked backfire on them already in this life. But even if they do not, God will bring the ungodly to judgment in the end. Should we be unhappy if God in his love and mercy is giving the wicked more time for repentance? (PBC)

37:11 *meek* – Those who humbly acknowledge their dependence on the goodness and grace of God and betray no arrogance toward their fellowman. (CSB)

Hbr ‘*anaw*, “humble.” They depend only on the Lord’s goodness and grace. Augustine: “Peace shall be your gold. Peace shall be your silver. Peace shall be your lands. Peace shall be your life, your God Peace” (NPNF 1 8:94). (TLSB)

abundant peace – Unmixed blessedness. (CSB)

This stands for the beneficence enjoyed by the godly, in contrast with life of suffering. (The Expositor’s Bible Commentary – Psalms)

37:12 *gnash their teeth* – The wicked plot (s.v. Ps. 10:2) against the righteous. They have schemes, hoping to ruin people who have faith and integrity. Their gnashing of their teeth may be a figurative description (as implied comparison with beasts of prey). (A Commentary of the Psalms - Ross)

As if to consume God's righteous people. (TLSB)

37:13 *LORD laughs* – Cf 1Sm 26:10; Jb 18:20. Aug: “The day of the unjust, which God foresees, will come. What day is that? The day for all vengeance!” (NPNF 1 8:94). (TLSB)

As in Psalm 2:4. This expression shows their schemes are laughable, feeble, and destined to fail. (A Commentary of the Psalms - Ross)

sees that his day is coming – Strikingly, the psalmist nowhere speaks of God's active involvement in bringing the wicked down—though he hints at it in v. 22. The certainty that the life of the wicked “will be cut off” is frequently asserted (vv. 9, 22, 28, 34, 38; cf. vv. 2, 8, 10, 15, 17, 20, 36, 38)—and the Lord also knows it—but God's positive action is here reserved for his care for and protection of the righteous. (CSB)

The time for each of them, when he will be “cut off,” as in 1Sa 26:10 (“his time,” lit. “his day”); Job 18:20 (“his fate”). (CSB)

37:14 *poor and needy* – Here, as often in the Psalms, “poor” characterizes not necessarily one who has no possessions, but one who is (and recognizes that he is) without resources to effect his own deliverance (or secure his own life, safety or well-being)—and so is dependent on God. (CSB)

Most cruel and brutal attack possible on the poor and defenseless. (TLSB)

They are not determined to destroy all who are poor and destitute, just the righteous among them. (A Commentary of the Psalms - Ross)

37:15 *sword will enter their heart...bows broken* – The wicked may hold sway in the temporal realm, but their injustice will be condemned, and they shall suffer eternal damnation on the Last Day. (TLSB)

37:16 *better is the little* – The godly should remain content with the daily necessities the Lord provides for them. Though the godly may not be as wealthy as many of the wicked seem to be, they should remember that their heavenly Father knows their needs and gives them everything they need. (PBC)

God has not promised a life of ease and unbounded prosperity this side of heaven. (TLSB)

37:17 *arms of the wicked...broken* – This signifies that they will have ability to fight, but the righteous will be sustained by the Lord. (A Commentary of the Psalms - Ross)

37:18 *blameless* – A claim of moral integrity not sinless perfection. (CSB)

God knows the days of the blameless – This points to the loving concern on the part of him who follows the things that are happening in the lives of his children. (Leupold)

37:19 *famine* – Common challenge in an agricultural society. Even in famine, the blameless will survive because the Lord knows His own. (TLSB)

Their inheritance, primarily the land but also continued fellowship with the Lord endures forever, even in the time of trouble or famine. They may not have much, but it will be sufficient. (A Commentary of the Psalms - Ross)

37:20 *glory of the pastures* – The grass and flowers (cf. v. 2; 90:5–6; 102:11; 103:15–16; Job 14:2; Isa 40:6–8; see Jas 1:10–11). (CSB)

vanish – Grass withers when winter comes. (TLSB)

37:21 Or “The wicked must borrow and cannot repay,/but the righteous are able to give generously” (see Dt 15:6; 28:12, 44). (CSB)

righteous is generous – The godly not only appreciate what the Lord has given them, but they also share their blessings generously with the needy. (PBC)

Blameless people repay their debts and give to their neighbor in need (cf Dt 15:6; 28:12, 44). (TLSB)

37:23 *the steps of a man are established* – We may fall, it is but for the moment, for he is not cast off, God never really forsakes him so that his children go begging for bread. (Leupold)

Augustine: “If the Lord did not order the steps of man, so crooked are they naturally, that they would always be going through crooked paths, and by pursuing crooked ways, would be unable to return again. He however came, and called us, and redeemed us, and shed His blood; He has given this ransom; He has done this good, and suffered these evils. Consider Him in what He has done, He is God! Consider Him in what He has suffered, He is Man!” (NPNF 1 8:97). (TLSB)

37:24 *fall* – At the same time saint and sinner, the righteous are tempted, turn, and commit actual sin, thus falling into the pit (cf Pr 24:16). Luth: “But the righteous are lifted up, because the wicked rely on dead things, while the righteous rely on the living Lord” (AE 10:174). (TLSB)

37:25 *not seen the righteous forsaken* – Believers are not promised absolute immunity from hardship in this verse, but throughout this psalm they are assured of the Lord’s continued care for them even in adversity. (PBC)

In a corrupt and sinful world, the righteous can experience temporal need, but the Lord does not forsake them. “Here, then, you have a rich Lord. He is certainly enough for you” (LC I 253). (TLSB)

37:26 *lending generously* – Accordingly to Psalm 15:5 they were not allowed to charge interest, and so if they were truly righteous there would be no gain for them in lending to people in need – it would be a gracious and generous act. (A Commentary of the Psalms - Ross)

37:27-33 In the next seven verses the psalmist tell how the Lord preserves the righteous from the fate of the wicked. (A Commentary of the Psalms - Ross)

37:27 *turn away* – To persevere in righteousness require a determined rejection of evil and an intentional pursuit of good. (A Commentary of the Psalms - Ross)

dwell forever. Temptation can temporarily cause the Christian to depart from the path of the righteous. When these temptations come, dismiss them by the Lord’s power. (TLSB)

37:28 *his saints* – It is one of several Hebrew words for God’s people, referring to them as people who are or should be devoted to God and faithful to him. (CSB)

37:29 *forever* – They and their children and children’s children, in contrast to the wicked (see v. 28). (CSB)

37:30 *wisdom* – Since they know and believe the Law they have good things to say that please God and help others. (A Commentary of the Psalms - Ross)

37:31 *steps do not slip* – From the right path (see 17:5). (CSB)

Augustine: “The ‘word of God in the heart’ frees from the snare” (NPNF 1 8:101). (TLSB)

37:32 *seeking their very lives* – Attempting to seize by false charges at court (see v. 33) the very livelihood of their intended victims. (CSB)

37:33 Augustine: “Some [the martyrs] they slew with the sword; some they crucified; some they delivered to the beasts; some they burnt by fire; others they led about in chains, till wasted out by a long protracted decay. Assuredly ‘the Lord forsakes not His Saints’ ” (NPNF 1 8:101). (TLSB)

37:34 *Wait for the LORD* – Dependence on and faithfulness to the Lord always go hand in hand with faithful obedience to His Commandments. (TLSB)

37:35 *spreading himself* – The verb has the idea of “showing oneself naked,” but is interpreted in the sense of “spreading” like a luxuriant tree, i.e., displaying richness and influence. (A Commentary of the Psalms – Ross)

37:36 *was no more* – As Proverbs reiterates, do not envy them for they will be cut off. (A Commentary of the Psalms - Ross)

37:37–38 The great contrast: hope for the one, no hope for the other. (CSB)

The psalmist instructs the people to watch as they wait; for the righteous who live in peace have this future; but the wicked do not. (A Commentary of the Psalms - Ross)

37:37 *man of peace* – One who loves peace and is at peace in the midst of trouble. (TLSB)

37:39-40 Comforting conclusion; the Lord will deliver the righteous. Aug: “At present therefore let the righteous bear with the sinner; let the wheat bear with the tares; let the grain bear with the chaff: for the time of separation will come, and the good seed shall be set apart from that which is to be consumed with fire” (NPNF 1 8:102). Cf Mt 13:30. (TLSB)

Ps 37 This psalm stresses two things: the righteous are blessed of God in due season, and divine punishment will overtake the wicked. Our Lord does not abandon us, His children, to the schemes of the wicked, but on the Last Day He will fulfill our salvation and eternally deliver us from our enemies of sin, death, and the devil. • Heavenly Father, You have begun Your good work in us. Continue, we pray, to fill us with the wisdom and knowledge of Your life-giving Word. Grant that our cross and sufferings may direct our hearts and minds to You, O Christ, our sure and blessed hope. Amen. (TLSB)

