

Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs: The Master Musician's Melodies

Bereans Sunday School
Placerita Baptist Church
2004

by
William D. Barrick, Th.D.
Professor of OT, The Master's Seminary



Psalm 37 — Don't Fret

1.0 Introducing Psalm 37

- See the Introduction for Psalm 36 for the relationships between Psalms 35–37.
- Psalm 37:11 appears to have been the source for the Third Beatitude in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:5, “Blessed are the gentle [or, meek], for they shall inherit the earth”).
- Psalm 37 is an acrostic psalm, with a consecutive letter of the Hebrew alphabet being the first letter of every other verse. See Psalms 9–10, 25, and 34. The next acrostic psalm will be Psalm 111.
- This psalm was written by David in his old age (verse 25).
- It is a fitting sequel to Psalm 36, which concluded with the visualization of judgment:

There the doers of iniquity have fallen;
They have been thrust down and cannot rise.

2.0 Reading Psalm 37 (NAU)

A Psalm of David.

- ⌘ 37:1 **Do not fret** because of evildoers,
Be not envious toward wrongdoers.
- 37:2 For they will wither quickly like the grass
And fade like the green herb.
- ☐ 37:3 Trust in the LORD and do good;
Dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness.

- 37:4 Delight yourself in the LORD;
And He will give you the desires of your heart.
- 37:5 Commit your way to the LORD;
Trust also in Him, and He will do it.
- 37:6 He will bring forth your righteousness as the light
And your judgment as the noonday.
- 37:7 Rest in the LORD and wait patiently for Him;
Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way,
Because of the man who carries out wicked schemes.
- 37:8 Cease from anger and forsake wrath;
Do not fret; *it leads* only to evildoing.
- 37:9 For evildoers will be cut off,
But those who wait for the LORD, they will inherit the land.
- 37:10 Yet a little while and the wicked man will be no more;
And you will look carefully for his place and he will not be *there*.
- 37:11 But the humble will inherit the land
And will delight themselves in abundant prosperity.
- 37:12 The wicked plots against the righteous
And gnashes at him with his teeth.
- 37:13 The Lord laughs at him,
For He sees his day is coming.
- 37:14 The wicked have drawn the sword and bent their bow
To cast down the afflicted and the needy,
To slay those who are upright in conduct.
- 37:15 Their sword will enter their own heart,
And their bows will be broken.
- 37:16 Better is the little of the righteous
Than the abundance of many wicked.
- 37:17 For the arms of the wicked will be broken,
But the LORD sustains the righteous.
- 37:18 The LORD knows the days of the blameless,
And their inheritance will be forever.
- 37:19 They will not be ashamed in the time of evil,
And in the days of famine they will have abundance.
- 37:20 But the wicked will perish;
And the enemies of the LORD will be like the glory of the pastures,
They vanish—like smoke they vanish away.
- 37:21 The wicked borrows and does not pay back,
But the righteous is gracious and gives.
- 37:22 For those blessed by Him will inherit the land,
But those cursed by Him will be cut off.
- 37:23 The steps of a man are established by the LORD,



And He delights in his way.

37:24 When he falls, he will not be hurled headlong,
Because the LORD is the One who holds his hand.

37:25 I have been young and now I am old,
Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken
Or his descendants begging bread.

37:26 All day long he is gracious and lends,
And his descendants are a blessing.

37:27 Depart from evil and do good,
So you will abide forever.

37:28 For the LORD loves justice
And does not forsake His godly ones;

They are preserved forever,

But the descendants of the wicked will be cut off.

37:29 The righteous will inherit the land
And dwell in it forever.

37:30 The mouth of the righteous utters wisdom,
And his tongue speaks justice.

37:31 The law of his God is in his heart;
His steps do not slip.

37:32 The wicked spies upon the righteous
And seeks to kill him.

37:33 The LORD will not leave him in his hand
Or let him be condemned when he is judged.

37:34 Wait for the LORD and keep His way,
And He will exalt you to inherit the land;
When the wicked are cut off, you will see it.

37:35 I have seen a wicked, violent man
Spreading himself like a luxuriant tree in its native soil.

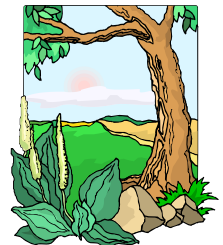
37:36 Then he passed away, and lo, he was no more;
I sought for him, but he could not be found.

37:37 Mark the blameless man, and behold the upright;
For the man of peace will have a posterity.

37:38 But transgressors will be altogether destroyed;
The posterity of the wicked will be cut off.

37:39 But the salvation of the righteous is from the LORD;
He is their strength in time of trouble.

37:40 The LORD helps them and delivers them;
He delivers them from the wicked and saves them,
Because they take refuge in Him.



3.0 Understanding Psalm 37

3.1 Outline

- I. Precepts for the Righteous (vv. 1-11)
- II. Punishment of the Unrighteous (vv. 12-22)
- III. Preservation of the Righteous (vv. 23-29)
- IV. Promise for the Righteous (vv. 30-34)
- V. Perpetuation of the Righteous (vv. 35-40)



3.2 Notes

- **Psalm 37 and Parallels in the Book of Proverbs**

Psalm 37	Proverbs
v. 1	23:17; 24:1, 19
v. 5	16:3
vv. 9, 11, 22, 29, 34	2:21
v. 16	15:16; 16:8
v. 22	3:33
v. 23	20:24
v. 24	24:16
v. 28	2:8, 22
v. 30	10:13, 31
v. 32	1:11
v. 37	23:18
v. 38	24:20

- **v. 1** “Do not fret”
 - The command is literally, “do not get heated.”
 - In modern terms, the equivalent might be, “Don’t get all worked up” or “Stay cool” or “Don’t get in a tizzy.”
 - See Proverbs 24:19.
 - “Rather than destroying themselves with negative emotions, the godly must keep things in perspective (v. 1; cf. vv. 7-8; Prov 3:31; 23:17; 24:1, 19). Anger, resentment, and jealousy destroy ‘faith’ in God’s goodness and justice and affect one’s inner attitude toward everything (cf. Ps 73).”—Willem A. VanGemeren, “Psalms,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 12 vols., ed. by Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 5:298.

- **vv. 1-8** Fourteen Imperatives (cf. vv. 27, 34, 37)

Verse	Positive Imperative	Negative Imperative
1		Do not fret
3	Trust in the LORD	
	Do good	
	Dwell in the land	
	Cultivate faithfulness	
4	Delight yourself in the LORD	
5	Commit your way to the LORD	
	Trust in Him	
7	Rest in the LORD	
	Wait patiently for Him	Do not fret
8	Cease from anger	
	Forsake wrath	Do not fret

- **v. 5** “Commit your way to the LORD”
 - “Commit” is literally “roll” (on the LORD).
 - “Way” refers to one’s entire life and how he or she lives it.
 - See Psalm 1:6.

- **vv. 9-38** Eight Contrasts

Verse	The Wicked	The Righteous
9	Will be cut off	Will inherit the land
10-11	Will be no more	Will inherit the land
17	Arms will be broken	The LORD sustains them
18-20	Will perish/vanish	Will inherit forever Will not be ashamed Will have abundance
21	Borrow/don’t pay back	Gracious/gives
22	Cursed/cut off	Blessed/will inherit the land
28	Cut off	Preserved forever
37-38	Posterity will be cut off	Will have a posterity

- **vv. 11, 37** “prosperity ... peace”
 - In both of these verses the Hebrew word is *shalom*.
 - The meaning is much more than cessation of war. The word conveys the concepts of soundness, completion, well-being, security, wholeness, and prosperity.

- v. 15 “Their sword will enter their own heart”
 - This is the “boomerang principle” with regard to wicked deeds.
 - See Psalm 7:12-16.

- v. 25 “I have not seen”
 - Such personal observations are characteristic of wisdom literature in the Old Testament (see v. 35; Prov 24:30-34).
 - Was David’s observation accurate? Is it a normative principle that we can expect to be true even today?

- v. 28 “His godly ones”
 - The term is the same one used to refer to the Hasidic Jews: *hasid*.
 - This is related to *hesed*.
 - Its meaning is “faithful ones” or “loyal ones.”

- v. 35 “like a luxuriant tree in its native soil”
 - This is the reverse of Psalm 1:3, where the righteous is depicted as a fruitful tree.
 - The contrast in character but identity of apparent prosperity is exactly the reason for the question for which this psalm is the intended answer.

- vv. 37-38 “posterity”
 - “Posterity” could also be translated as “end” or even “future.”
 - Even as “future,” their offspring could be intended (cf. Prov 24:20).

- vv. 39, 40 “strength ... helps ... refuge”
 - “The psalm ends with calm objectivity, the answer to the fretful impatience encountered at the start. Note the *from* Him (39) and the *in* Him (40): His initiative in sending, and our response in taking shelter; the help that He gives, and the refuge that He is.”—Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1–72*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 153.

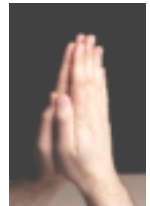
4.0 Singing Psalm 37 (Tune: “O Sacred Head, Now Wounded”)

<p>1 Commit whatever grieves thee Into the gracious hands Of Him Who never leaves thee, Who Heav’n and earth commands. Who points the clouds their courses, Whom winds and waves obey, He will direct thy footsteps And find for thee a way.</p>	<p>2 On Him place Thy reliance If thou wouldst be secure; His work thou must consider If thine is to endure. By anxious sighs and grieving And self tormenting care God is not moved to giving; All must be gained by prayer.</p>
---	--

<p>5 Though all the powers of evil The will of God oppose, His purpose will not falter, His pleasure onward goes. Whate'er God's will resolveth, Whatever He intends, Will always be accomplished True to His aims and ends.</p>	<p>6 Then hope, my feeble spirit, And be thou undismayed; God helps in every trial And makes thee unafraid. Await His time with patience, Then shall thine eyes behold The sun of joy and gladness His brightest beams unfold.</p>
<p>7 Arise, my soul, and banish Thy anguish and thy care. Away with thoughts that sadden And heart and mind ensnare! Thou art not lord and master Of thine own destiny; Enthroned in highest Heaven, God rules in equity.</p>	<p>8 Leave all to His direction; In wisdom He doth reign, And in a way most wondrous His course He will maintain. Soon He, His promise keeping, With wonder-working skill Shall put away the sorrows That now thy spirit fill.</p> <p>— Words: Paul Gerhardt, 1656 Music: Hans L. Hassler, 1601</p>

5.0 Praying Psalm 37

- Lord, keep me from fretting over the success of wicked people. [v. 1]
- I commit my life to You, O God. [v. 5]
- Help me to be satisfied with what little I have. [v. 16]
- Father, make me a gracious giver and faithful in paying my debts. [v. 21]
- Thank You for being there for me in times of trouble. [vv. 39-40]
-
-



6.0 Applying Psalm 37

- As believers, we should not fret over the apparent success of ungodly people.
- God is sovereign. He will recompense the wicked for their evil deeds.
- Just as God promised faithful Israel a land, so He also promises to give believers the earth as an inheritance. (See Matthew 5:5.)