

Psalm 37

Title: The Security of the Righteous and the Insecurity of the Wicked

Author and Date: David

Key Verses: Psalm 37:9, 17, 22, 28, 34

Type: Didactic (Teaching)

Outline

- A. Exhortations to the righteous: trust in the Lord (verses 1-11).
- B. Warnings to the wicked: your day is coming (verses 12-20).
- C. Promises to the righteous: the Lord preserves you (verses 21-31).
- D. Assurances to both: the wicked destroyed and the righteous delivered (verses 32-40).

Notes

Title: “A Psalm of David.” See the notes on Psalm 3.

Summary: Psalm 37 is an alphabetical acrostic psalm (see the notes on Psalms 9, 10, 25, and 34). Starting with the first verse, every other verse begins with a succeeding letter of the Hebrew alphabet: verse 1 (*aleph*), verse 3 (*beth*), verse 5 (*gimel*), etc. (there are four exceptions: verses 8, 21, 28b, and 39). This psalm is also didactic in style because it seeks to teach wisdom (verse 30) concerning the security of the righteous and the insecurity of the wicked. The psalmist wants to answer the age-old question: “Why do the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer?” (see also Psalm 73 and the book of Job). David wrote this psalm when he was old and wise with a lifetime of experience (verse 25). This psalm is based upon what David has “seen” in life concerning the righteous (verse 25) and the wicked (verse 35). The psalmist encourages the righteous to trust in the Lord and not worry about the success of the wicked. He reminds the righteous that the success of the wicked is short-lived and the wicked ultimately will be cut off. This psalm is similar to Proverbs, with short, proverbial-style sayings (compare verse 1 with Proverbs 24:19 and verse 16 with Proverbs 15:16).

Verse 1: “Them that work unrighteous” refer to the wicked in the land, whether home-born or foreign invaders, at the time of writing this psalm. The psalmist wants to teach about the seeming prosperity of the wicked (see also verses 7, 9, 10, 16, 20, 28, 34-36, and 38). “Fret not thyself” is repeated in verses 7b and 8b. It means, “Don’t get heated”, “Don’t fume”, or “Don’t worry” (NLT).

Verse 2: “Cut down like grass” is a common figure for what is transient and perishable.

Verse 3: “Dwell in the land” refers to the land promise given to Abraham (Gen. 15:7), the faithful Israelite (Deut. 16:20; 30:20), and to Joshua (Josh. 1:6). See more in the notes on verse 11.

Verse 7: To “wait” on the Lord is a popular exhortation in this psalm (see also verses 9 and 34) and other psalms (Psa. 27:14; 33:20; 40:1; 69:6; 130:5). It means to patiently trust in the Lord while allowing him to providentially carry out his will.

Verse 11: Jesus directly quotes, or at least refers to, the first part of this verse in Matthew 5:5: “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” (Jesus’ words are also anticipated by the prophecies of Isaiah in 49:8; 57:13; and 60:21.) “Inherit the earth” does not refer to a future time when the righteous will come back to live in Paradise on a restored earth as Premillennialists, the J.W.s, and others teach. This phrase refers to the peaceful living of the righteous Israelite on the earth in David’s day (see the last part of this verse and verses 3, 9, 18, 22, 27-29, and 34). The righteous will “inherit the land” because they have been rescued from the wicked and the wicked have been cut off (verses 2, 10, 17, 20, 22, 34, and 38). Godly living during the time of this psalm leads to a long life of peace in the land (see also Psalm 25:13 and Proverbs 2:21-22). Note also that the righteous are inheriting the land at the same time that the wicked are among them (see verses 18-20, and 34), not at some future time after the judgment day when the righteous are separated from the wicked.

Verse 37: “Mark the perfect man” means to set your eyes on this man, follow his example, and understand his blessed end.

Questions

1. What negative exhortations (things not to do) does the psalmist give his readers regarding evil-doers and why are they not to do these things (verses 1-2)?
2. What positive exhortations (things to do) does the psalmist give his readers regarding the Lord (verses 3-7)?
3. What does the Lord do for the one who delights in him and trusts in him (verses 4-6)?
4. What does the psalmist further counsel his readers not to do in the face of evil (verse 8)?
5. What happens to evil-doers and what happens to those who wait for the Lord (verses 9-11)?

6. What do the wicked do to the just, the poor, and the upright and what happens to the wicked (verses 12-15)?

7. What is better and why (verses 16-17)?

8. What happens to the perfect and what happens to the wicked (verses 18-20)?

9. What are the differences between the wicked and the righteous (verses 21-22)?

10. What does the Lord do for those who follow him (verses 23-24)?

11. What does the psalmist “see” (observe) concerning the righteous (verses 25-26)?

12. What does the psalmist counsel his readers to do and why (verses 27-28)?

13. How does the psalmist describe the righteous (verses 29-31)?

14. What do the wicked do to the righteous and how does the Lord respond (verses 32-33)?

15. What does the psalmist counsel his readers to do (verse 34)?

16. What does the psalmist “see” (observe) concerning the wicked (verses 35-36)?

17. What is the end of the upright man and what is the end of the wicked man (verses 37-38)?

18. What will the Lord do for the righteous (verses 39-40)?

Applications for Today

1. Faith cures fretting. Trust in God is the antidote to fretting, envy, and anger. We are not to be fretful, envious, or angry over the actions of the wicked (verse 1-3, 8). What are Christians not to do (Mt. 6:25-34; Lk. 10:41; Phil. 4:6)?
2. The prosperity of the wicked is short-lived (verse 2, 10, 20, 35, and 36). His day is coming (verse 13). His evil will come back on him (verse 15). He will ultimately be cut off (verse 22 and 38). What does God use government to do to evil men (Rom. 13:3-4; 1 Pet. 2:14)? Who is the face of the Lord upon (1 Pet. 3:12)? What will God do to evil men in the judgment day (Rom. 2:9)? What will happen to the wicked at the end of time (Mt. 13:49-50)?
3. The righteous act differently than the wicked (verse 21, 26, 30, and 31). How are Christians to act with reference to the world (Rom. 12:1-2; Jas. 4:4; 1 Jn. 2:15-17)?
4. The righteous will ultimately be saved (verses 39-40). How do the righteous live (Rom. 1:17)? What is the ultimate reward of the righteous (Mt. 25:46)? What do the righteous experience before they are saved (1 Pet. 4:12-19)? What is necessary to go to heaven (Rev. 19:8)?
5. When we are surrounded by wickedness, we need to learn to “trust in the Lord” (verse 3), “delight in the Lord” (verse 4), “commit our way unto the Lord” (verse 5), “rest in the Lord” (verse 7), and “wait on the Lord” (verse 34). What did Paul do (Phil. 2:24)? What does Peter tell Christians to do in 1 Peter 4:19 and 5:7? What does James 5:11 say?
6. When we are surrounded by wickedness, we need to “mark the perfect man” and let him be our example to follow (verse 37)? Who are Christians to imitate (1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1; Eph. 5:1; Phil. 3:17; 4:9; 1 Thess. 1:6; 2:14; 2 Thess. 3:7, 9; Heb. 6:12; 13:7; 3 Jn. 11)?