
By David.

PSALM 37: 1 Don't fret because of evildoers, neither be envious against those who work unrighteousness.

Godly directions for those who are in adversity not to envy the prosperity of the wicked, because it is superficial, and of short duration, vv. 1-22; to put their confidence in God, and live to his glory, as this is the sure way to be happy in this life, and in that which is to come, vv. 23-40.

In the title this Psalm is attributed to David by the Hebrew, and by most of the Versions: but it is more likely it was intended as an instructive and consoling ode for the captives in Babylon, who might feel themselves severely tempted when they saw those idolaters in prosperity; and themselves, who worshipped the true God, in affliction and slavery. They are comforted with the prospect of speedy deliverance; and their return to their own land is predicted in not less than ten different places in this Psalm.

This Psalm is one of the acrostic or alphabetical kind: but it differs from those we have already seen, in having two verses under each letter; the first only exhibiting the alphabetical letter consecutively. There are a few anomalies in the Psalm. The hemistich, which should begin with the letter א ain, has now a ל lamed prefixed to the word with which it begins, לעולם leolam; and the hemistich which should begin with ט tau (Psa 37:39) has now a ו vau prefixed, ותשוועת utheshuath. It appears also that the letters ד dalet, כ caph, and ק koph, have each lost a hemistich; and א ain, half a one. The manner in which this Psalm is printed in Dr. Kennicott's Hebrew Bible gives a full view of all these particulars. To the English reader some slighter differences may appear; but it should be observed, that the verses in our English Bibles are not always divided as those in the Hebrew. In all the Psalms that have a title, the title forms the first verse in the Hebrew; but our translation does not acknowledge any of those titles as a part of the Psalm, and very properly leaves them out of the enumeration of the verses.

Verse 1

Fret not thyself because of evil doers - It is as foolish as it is wicked to repine or be envious at the prosperity of others. Whether they are godly or ungodly, it is God who is the dispenser of the bounty they enjoy; and, most assuredly, he has a right to do what he will with his own. To be envious in such a case, is to arraign the providence of God. And it is no small condescension in the Almighty to reason with such persons as he does in this Psalm.

PSALM 37: 2 For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither like the green herb.

Verse 2

For they shall soon be cut down - They have their portion in this life; and their enjoyment of it cannot be long, for their breath is but a vapor that speedily vanishes away. They fall before death, as the greensward does before the scythe of the mower.

PSALM 37: 3 Trust in the LORD, and do good. Dwell in the land, and enjoy safe pasture.

Verse 3

Dwell in the land - Do not flee to foreign climes to escape from that providence which, for thy own good, denies thee affluence in thy own country.

And verily thou shalt be fed - God will provide for thee the necessaries of life: its conveniences might damp thy intellect in its inventions, and lead thee into idleness; and its superfluities would induce thee to pamper thy passions till the concerns of thy soul would be absorbed in those of the flesh and, after having lived an animal life, thou mightest die without God, and perish everlastingly.

The original, ורעה אמונה ureeh emunah, might be translated, "and feed by faith." The Septuagint has και ποιμανθηση επι τω πλουτω αυτης, and thou shalt feed upon its riches. The Vulgate Ethiopic, and Arabic, are the same. The Syriac, seek faith. The Chaldee, be strong in the faith. The Anglo-Saxon, and feeded thou shalt be in its welfare. Old Psalter, and thou shalt be fed in riches of it. But it is probable that אמונה emunah here signifies security. And thou shalt be fed in security.

Dr. Delaney supposed that the Psalm might have been written by David in the behalf of Mephibosheth, who, being falsely accused by his servant Ziba, had formed the resolution to leave a land where he had met with such bad treatment. David, being convinced of his innocence, entreats him to dwell in the land, with the assurance of plenty and protection. It is more likely that it is addressed to the captives in Babylon; and contains the promise that they shall return to their own land, and again enjoy peace and plenty.

PSALM 37: 4 Also delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.

Verse 4

Delight thyself also in the Lord - Expect all thy happiness from him, and seek it in him.

The desires of thine heart - משאלות mishaloth, the petitions. The godly man never indulges a desire which he cannot form into a prayer to God.

PSALM 37: 5 Commit your way to the LORD. Trust also in him, and he will do this:

Verse 5

Commit thy way unto the Lord - גול על יהוה gol al Yehovah, Roll thy way upon the Lord: probably, a metaphor taken from the camel, who lies down till his load be rolled upon him.

He shall bring it to pass - יעשה yaaseh, "He will work." Trust God, and he will work for thee.

PSALM 37: 6 he will make your righteousness go out as the light, and your justice as the noon day sun.

 Verse 6

Thy righteousness as the light - As God said in the beginning, "Let there be light, and there was light;" so he shall say, Let thy innocence appear, and it will appear as suddenly and as evident as the light was at the beginning.

PSALM 37: 7 Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him. Don't fret because of him who prospers in his way, because of the man who makes wicked plots happen.

Verse 7

Rest in the Lord - דום dom, "be silent, be dumb." Do not find fault with thy Maker; he does all things well for others, he will do all things well for thee.

And wait patiently for him - והתחולל לו vehithcholel lo, and set thyself to expect him; and be determined to expect, or wait for him. Such is the import of a verb in the hithpoel conjugation.

A heathen gives good advice on a similar subject: -

Nil ergo optabunt homines? Si consilium vis,

Permittes ipsis expendere Numinibus, quid

Conveniat nobis, rebusque sit utile nostris.

Nam pro jucundis aptissima quaeque dabunt Di.

Carior est illis homo, quam sibi.

Juv. Sat. 10:346. "What then remains? Are we deprived of will?

Must we not wish, for fear of wishing ill?

Receive my counsel, and securely move;

Intrust thy pastime to the powers above.

Leave them to manage for thee, and to grant

What their unerring wisdom sees thee want.

In goodness, as in greatness, they excel:

Ah, that we loved ourselves but half so well!"

Dryden.

PSALM 37: 8 Cease from anger, and forsake wrath. Don't fret, it leads only to evildoing.

PSALM 37: 9 For evildoers shall be cut off, but those who wait for the LORD shall inherit the land.

Verse 9

They shall inherit the earth - The word ארץ arets, throughout this Psalm, should be translated land, not earth; for it is most probable that it refers to the land of Judea; and in this verse there is a promise of their return thither.

PSALM 37: 10 For yet a little while, and the wicked will be no more. Yes, though you look for his place, he isn't there.

Verse 10

For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be - A prediction of the destruction of Babylon. This empire was now in its splendor; and the captives lived to see it totally overturned by Cyrus, so that even the shadow of its power did not remain.

Thou shalt diligently consider his place - ואינו veeynenu, and he is not. The ruler is killed; the city is taken; and the whole empire is overthrown, in one night! And now even the place where Babylon stood cannot be ascertained.

PSALM 37: 11 But the humble shall inherit the land, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.

Verse 11

But the meek - עניים anavim, the afflicted, the poor Jewish captives.

Shall inherit the earth - ארץ arets, the land of Judea given by God himself as an inheritance to their fathers, and to their posterity for ever. See Psa 37:9.

PSALM 37: 12 The wicked plots against the just, and gnashes at him with his teeth.

PSALM 37: 13 The Lord will laugh at him, for he sees that his day is coming.

Verse 13

He seeth that his day is coming - The utter desolation of your oppressors is at hand. All this may be said of every wicked man.

PSALM 37: 14 The wicked have drawn out the sword, and have bent their bow, to cast down the poor and needy, to kill those who are upright on the path.

Verse 14

The wicked have drawn out the sword - There is an irreconcilable enmity in the souls of sinners against the godly; and there is much evidence that the idolatrous Babylonians whetted their tongue like a sword, and shot out their arrows, even bitter words, to malign the poor captives, and to insult them in every possible way.

PSALM 37: 15 Their sword shall enter into their own heart. Their bows shall be broken.

Verse 15

Their sword shall enter into their own heart - All their execrations and maledictions shall fall upon themselves, and their power to do mischief shall be broken.

PSALM 37: 16 Better is a little that the righteous has, than the abundance of many wicked.

Verse 16

A little that a righteous man hath - This is a solid maxim.

Whatever a good man has, has God's blessing in it; even the blessings of the wicked are cursed.

PSALM 37: 17 For the arms of the wicked shall be broken, but the LORD upholds the righteous.

Verse 17

The arms of the wicked - Their power to do evil. Of this they are often deprived. Talents lent and abused shall be resumed, and the misuser called to a severe account by the Lord of the talents.

PSALM 37: 18 The LORD knows the days of the perfect. Their inheritance shall be forever.

Verse 18

The Lord knoweth the days of the upright - He is acquainted with all his circumstances, severings, and ability to bear them; and he will either shorten his trials or increase his power. The Lord also approves of the man and his concerns; and his inheritance shall be for ever. He shall have God for his portion, here and hereafter. This is probably another indirect promise to the captives that they shall be restored to their own land. See Psa 37:11.

PSALM 37: 19 They shall not be disappointed in the time of evil. In the days of famine they shall be satisfied.

Verse 19

They shall not be ashamed - They have expressed strong confidence in the Lord; and he shall so work in their behalf that their enemies shall never be able to say, "Ye have trusted in your God, and yet your enemies have prevailed over you." No; for even in the days of famine they shall be satisfied.

PSALM 37: 20 But the wicked shall perish. The enemies of the LORD shall be like the beauty of the fields. They will vanish— vanish like smoke.

Verse 20

The enemies of the Lord shall be as the fat of lambs - This verse has given the critics some trouble. Several of the Versions read thus: "But the enemies of the Lord, as soon as they are exalted to honor, shall vanish; like smoke they vanish." If we follow the Hebreto, it intimates that they shall consume as the fat of lambs. That is, as the fat is wholly consumed in sacrifices by the fire on the altar, so shall they consume away in the fire of God's wrath.

PSALM 37: 21 The wicked borrow, and don't pay back, but the righteous give generously.

Verse 21

The wicked borroweth - Is often reduced to penury, and is obliged to become debtor to those whom he before despised.

And payeth not again - May refuse to do it, because he is a wicked man; or be unable to do it, because he is reduced to beggary.

But the righteous showeth mercy - Because he has received mercy from God, therefore he shows mercy to men. And even to his enemies he showeth mercy, and giveth; his heart being disposed to it by the influence of Divine grace and his hand being enabled to do it by the blessing of God's providence.

PSALM 37: 22 For such as are blessed by him shall inherit the land. Those who are cursed by him shall be cut off.

Verse 22

Shall inherit the earth - ארץ arets the land, as before. See Psa 37:11.

Shall be cut off - A wicked Jew shall meet with the same fate as a wicked Babylonian; and a wicked Christian shall fare no better.

PSALM 37: 23 A man's goings are established by the LORD. He delights in his way.

Verse 23

The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord - There is nothing for good in the text. גבר geber is the original word, and it properly signifies a strong man, a conqueror or hero; and it appears to be used here to show, that even the most powerful must be supported by the Lord, otherwise their strength and courage will be of little avail.

And he delighteth in his way - When his steps are ordered by the Lord, he delighteth in his way, because it is that into which his own good Spirit has directed him. Or, the man delights in God's way - in the law and testimonies of his Maker.

PSALM 37: 24 Though he stumble, he shall not fall, for the LORD holds him up with his hand.

Verse 24

Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down - The original is short and emphatic כי יפל לא יוטל ki yippol, lo yutal, which the Chaldee translates, "Though he should fall into sickness, he shall not die;" for which the reason is given, because the Lord sustains by his hand. Though he may for a time fall under the power of his adversaries, as the Jews have done under the Babylonish captivity, he shall not be forsaken. The right hand of God shall sustain him in his afflictions and distresses; and at last God will give him a happy issue out of them all. Neither the text nor any of the Versions intimate that a falling into sin is meant; but a falling into trouble, difficulty, etc.

PSALM 37: 25 I have been young, and now am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his children begging for bread.

Verse 25

I have been young, and now am old - I believe this to be literally true in all cases. I am now grey-headed myself; I have traveled in different countries, and have had many opportunities of seeing and conversing with religious people in all situations in life; and I have not, to my knowledge, seen one instance to the contrary. I have seen no righteous man forsaken, nor any children of the righteous begging their bread. God puts this honor upon all that fear him; and thus careful is he of them, and of their posterity.

PSALM 37: 26 All day long he deals graciously, and lends. His seed is blessed.

Verse 26

He is ever merciful and lendeth - כל היום חונן kol haiyom chonen, "all the day he is compassionate." He is confirmed in the habit of godliness: he feels for the distresses of men, and is ready to divide and distribute to all that are in necessity.

And his seed is blessed - The preceding words were not spoken casually; his seed, his posterity, is blessed; therefore they are not abandoned to beg their bread.

PSALM 37: 27 Depart from evil, and do good. Live securely forever.

Verse 27

Depart from evil, and do good - Seeing the above is so, depart from all evil - avoid all sin; and let not this be sufficient, do good. The grace of God ever gives this two-fold power to all who receive it; strength to overcome evil, and strength to do that which is right.

Dwell for evermore - Be for ever an inhabitant of God's house. This may be also a promise of return to their own land, and of permanent residence there. See Psa 37:9, Psa 37:11, etc.

PSALM 37: 28 For the LORD loves justice, and doesn't forsake his saints. They are preserved forever, but the children of the wicked shall be cut off.

Verse 28

Forsaketh not his saints - את חסידיו eth chasidaiv, his merciful or compassionate ones; those who, through love to him and all mankind, are ever ready to give of their substance to the poor.

But the seed of the wicked shall be cut off - The children who follow the wicked steps of wicked parents shall, like their parents, be cut off. God's judgments descend to posterity, as well as his mercies.

PSALM 37: 29 The righteous shall inherit the land, and live in it forever.

Verse 29

The righteous shall inherit the land - If this be not another promise of return to their own land, from that of their captivity, it must be spiritually understood, and refer to their eternal dwelling with God in glory.

PSALM 37: 30 The mouth of the righteous talks of wisdom. His tongue speaks justice.

Verse 30

The mouth of the righteous speaketh wisdom - Foolish and corrupt conversation cannot come out of their mouth. They are taught of God, and they speak according to the wisdom that is from above.

PSALM 37: 31 The law of his God is in his heart. None of his steps shall slide.

Verse 31

The law of his God is in his heart - The Lord promised that a time should come in which he would make a new covenant with the house of Israel; he would put his laws in their minds, and in their hearts he would write them. This is fulfilled in the case above.

None of his steps shall slide - His holy heart always dictates to his eyes, his mouth, his hands, and his feet. The precepts which direct his conduct are not only written in his Bible, but also in his heart.

PSALM 37: 32 The wicked watches the righteous, and seeks to kill him.

Verse 32

The wicked watcheth the righteous, and seeketh to slay him - Similar to what is said Psa 37:8 : "The wicked plotteth against the righteous." But it is added, Psa 37:33 : "The Lord will not leave him in his hands;" he will confound his devices, and save his own servants.

PSALM 37: 33 The LORD will not leave him in his hand, nor condemn him when he is judged.

PSALM 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 shall see it.

Verse 34

Wait on the Lord, and keep his way - This is the true mode of waiting on God which the Scripture recommends; keeping God's way - using all his ordinances, and living in the spirit of obedience. He who waits thus is sure to have the farther blessings of which he is in pursuit. קָוָה kavah, to wait, implies the extension of a right line from one point to another. The first point is the human heart; the line is its intense desire; and the last point is God, to whom this heart extends this straight line of earnest desire to be filled with the fullness of the blessing of the Gospel of peace.

And he shall exalt thee to inherit the land - If ye keep his way, and be faithful to him in your exile, he will exalt you, lift you up from your present abject state, to inherit the land of your fathers. See before, Psa 37:9, Psa 37:11, etc.

When the wicked are cut off, thou shalt see it - They did see the destruction of the Babylonish king, Belshazzar, and his empire; and it was in consequence of that destruction that they were enlarged.

PSALM 37: 35 I have seen the wicked in great power, spreading himself like a green tree in its native soil.

Verse 35

I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay-tree - Does not this refer to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and to the vision he had of the great tree which was in the midst of the earth, the head of which reached up to heaven? See Dan 4:10, etc.

PSALM 37: 36 But he passed away, and behold, he was not. Yes, I sought him, but he could not be found.

Verse 36

Yet he passed away - Both Nebuchadnezzar and his wicked successor, Belshazzar; and on the destruction of the latter, when God had weighed him in the balance, and found him wanting, numbered his days, and consigned him to death, his kingdom was delivered to the Medes and Persians; and thus the Babylonian empire was destroyed.

PSALM 37: 37 Mark the perfect man, and see the upright, for there is a future for the man of peace.

Verse 37

Mark the perfect man - Him who is described above. Take notice of him: he is perfect in his soul, God having saved him from all sin, and filled him with his own love and image. And he is upright in his conduct; and his end, die when he may or where he may, is peace, quietness, and assurance for ever.

Almost all the Versions translate the Hebrew after this manner: Preserve innocence, and keep equity in view; for the man of peace shall leave a numerous posterity.

Bishop Horsley thus translates: "Keep (thy) loyalty, and look well to (thy) integrity; for a posterity is (appointed) for the perfect man." He comes nearer to the original in his note on this verse: "Keep innocency, and regard uprightness; for the perfect man hath a posterity:" "but the rebellious shall be destroyed together; the posterity of the wicked shall be cut off," Psa 37:38.

Dr. Kennicott's note is, "אחרית acharith, which we render latter end, is posterity, Psa 109:13. The wicked and all his race to be destroyed, the pious man to have a numerous progeny, see his sons' sons to the third and fourth generation. See Job 8:19; Job 18:13-20."

I think the original cannot possibly bear our translation. I shall produce it here, with the literal version of Montanus: - *pax viro novissimum quia; rectum vide et, integrum cutodi* אחרית לשלום לאיש אחרית שמר כי ישר וראה תם שמר The nearest translation to this is that of the Septuagint and Vulgate: Φυλασσε ακακιαν, και δε ευθυτητα, οτι εστιν εγκαταλειμμα ανθρωπω ειρηνικω· Custodi innocentiam, et vide aequitatem; quoniam, sunt reliquiae homini pacifico. "Preserve innocence, and behold equity;

seeing there is a posterity to the pacific man." The Syriac says, "Observe simplicity, and choose rectitude; seeing there is a good end to the man of peace." The reader may choose. Our common version, in my opinion, cannot be sustained. The Psa 37:38 seems to confirm the translation of the Septuagint and the Vulgate, which are precisely the same in meaning; therefore I have given one translation for both.

The old Psalter deserves a place also: Kepe unnoyandnes, and se evenhede; for tha celykes er til a pesful man.

PSALM 37: 38 As for transgressors, they shall be destroyed together. The future of the wicked shall be cut off.

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

Verse 39

The salvation of the righteous is of the Lord - It is the Lord who made them righteous, by blotting out their sins, and infusing his Holy Spirit into their hearts; and it is by his grace they are continually sustained, and finally brought to the kingdom of glory: "He is their strength in the time of trouble."

PSALM 37: 40 The LORD helps them, and rescues them. He rescues them from the wicked, and saves them, Because they have taken refuge in him.

Verse 40

The Lord - shall deliver them - For they are always exposed to trials, and liable to fall.

Because they trust in him - They keep faith, prayer, love, and obedience in continual exercise. They continue to believe in, love, and obey God; and he continues to save them.