

## When the Wicked Prosper, Trust in the Sovereignty of God

### Psalm 37

Psalm 37:1-11 - *“Do not fret because of evildoers, nor be envious of the workers of iniquity. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb.*

*Trust in the LORD, and do good. Dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness. Delight yourself also in the LORD, and He shall give you the desires of your heart.*

*Commit your way to the LORD. Trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass. He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday. 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 brings wicked schemes to pass. For evildoers shall be cut off, but those who wait on the LORD shall inherit the earth. For yet a little while and the wicked shall be no more.*

*Indeed, you will look carefully for his place, but it shall be no more. But the meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.”*

### Background Notes

Psalm 37 is another alphabetic acrostic psalm. Every other verse begins with the succeeding letter of the twenty-two-letter Hebrew alphabet. Four of the Hebrew letters only have one verse, giving forty verses to the psalm instead of forty-four.

In this wisdom psalm, David exhorts his readers not to fret when wicked people seem to prosper, but rather continue to trust in the sovereign ways of the Lord. In Psalm 36, this age-old question was raised: Why do wicked people seem to prosper more than righteous people? The Lord does not fully answer this question in Psalm 36 - or anywhere else in the Bible. The Bible gives some answers about the problem of evil, or why the wicked prosper, but we don't know the full answer at the present time. But we do know that eventually all wickedness will be judged. The problem of evil will not exist forever.

In the meantime, until God works it all out, *“the just shall live by faith”* - and not question God's ways. So Psalm 37 is the perfect psalm to follow Psalm 36, because the believer is exhorted not to fret about the prosperity of the wicked, or lose their faith in God. Just continue to trust the Lord - and rest in the knowledge of His sovereign ways.

## Doctrinal / Teaching Points

### 1. Believers should not fret about the success of the wicked.

Three times in the first eleven verses, believers are exhorted not to fret about the prosperity of the wicked:

*“Do not fret because of evildoers” (v1).*

*“Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way” (v7).*

*“Do not fret—it only causes harm” (v8).*

To “fret” means to be disturbed and agitated – the opposite of peace of heart and mind. So Psalm 37 tells us:

- Don't worry, or be anxious about this problem!

- Don't be envious of prosperous wrongdoers. Why? Because their prosperity is only temporary: *“For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb” (v2).* They will be cut off, and they will be no more (v9-10).

- Don't get angry! Getting angry and uptight and fretting about the prosperous wicked can lead to your own wrongdoing. *“Cease from anger, and forsake wrath. Do not fret—it only causes harm.”* Don't sweat it!

So often this problem drags a believer down. But God says, “Don't fret.” Instead, faithfully trust in the Lord to give us the desires of our heart (v3-4). In due time, God will bring your righteousness to light (v5-6). And eventually the righteous will *“inherit the land” (v11)*. Then **they** will be the prosperous ones!

The Lord essentially taught the same truth when He gave His Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew 5:5 He said, *“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.”* Believers of all ages and dispensations can claim this promise because we will all be part of the Lord's literal earthly kingdom. Thus, we will literally inherit the earth. Talk about prosperity! We will own the earth as joint heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17).

In Psalm 37:12-22, five further reasons are given as to why there is no need for the righteous to fret about the prosperous wicked.

a. The Lord laughs at the feeble and futile attempts of the wicked.

Verses 12-13 - *“The wicked plots against the just, and gnashes at him with his teeth.*

*The Lord laughs at him, for He sees that his day is coming.”*

b. The evil plans of the wicked will boomerang, and they will reap what they have sown. Verses 14-15 - *“The wicked have drawn the sword and have bent their bow to cast down the poor and needy, to slay those who are of upright conduct.*

*Their sword shall enter their own heart, and their bows shall be broken.”*

c. The Lord Himself sustains and strengthens the believer.

Verses 16-17 – *“A little that a righteous man has is better than the riches of many wicked, for the arms of the wicked shall be broken, but the LORD upholds the righteous.”*

d. All the needs of the righteous will be provided, while the wicked will perish.

Verses 18-20 – *“The LORD knows the days of the upright, and their inheritance shall be forever. They shall not be ashamed in the evil time, and in the days of famine they shall be satisfied. But the wicked shall perish, and the enemies of the LORD, like the splendor of the meadows, shall vanish. Into smoke they shall vanish away.”*

e. The righteous will be rewarded for their giving, while the wicked will be punished for their robbery.

Verses 21-22 – *“The wicked borrows and does not repay, but the righteous shows mercy and gives. For those blessed by Him shall inherit the earth, but those cursed by Him shall be cut off.”*

Believers should not fret about the success of the wicked.

## **2. Believers should not lose faith because of the success of the wicked.**

In the second half of the psalm, further reasons and exhortations are given to encourage the believer not to lose faith, but to continue steadfastly even though the wicked prosper temporarily.

*“The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD, and He delights in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down, for the LORD upholds him with His hand” (v23-24).* In these verses we are greatly encouraged because we know that the Lord is with us every single step of our lives, even when we stumble.

*“I have been young, and now am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread. He is ever merciful, and lends; and his descendants are blessed” (v25-26).* From David’s own experience of many years, he had never seen the righteous go begging. Even though they may not be as prosperous as the wicked, they always have enough so that they can even give to others. This is a great biblical truth. A believer will always be able to give. The well never runs completely dry!

*“Depart from evil, and do good, and dwell forevermore. For the LORD loves justice, and does not forsake His saints. They are preserved forever, but descendants of the wicked shall be cut off. The righteous shall inherit the land and dwell in it forever” (v25-29).*

We see here that the righteous are promised an inheritance of “life forever” and the “land forever.” This will certainly be true of all believers, not only in the future earthly kingdom of our Lord, but in the New Heavens and New Earth for all eternity.

*“The mouth of the righteous speaks wisdom, and his tongue talks of justice. The law of his God is in his heart. None of his steps shall slide” (v30-31).*

*“The wicked watches the righteous, and seeks to slay him. The LORD will not leave him in his hand, nor condemn him when he is judged. Wait on the LORD, and keep His way, and He shall exalt you to inherit the land. When the wicked are cut off, you shall see it” (v32-34).* Here we see that all believers have to do is wait on the Lord, and eventually they will see justice prevail and the wicked cut off - either in this life, or at the final judgment.

*“I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a native green tree.*

*Yet he passed away, and behold, he was no more. Indeed, I sought him, but he could not be found” (v35-36).* Here David relates an incident in which he saw justice prevail in his own lifetime.

*“Mark the blameless man, and observe the upright, for the future of that man is peace.*

*But the transgressors shall be destroyed together; the future of the wicked shall be cut off” (v37-38).* We can be sure that the fruit of the righteous will continue on to future generations - but the fruit of the wicked will not continue, even though they may be prospering now.

In the conclusion of Psalm 37, the focus is the salvation, strength, and security from the Lord that all believers enjoy, which is far better than the temporary prosperity of the wicked. *“But the salvation of the righteous is from the LORD; He is their strength in the time of trouble, and the LORD shall help them and deliver them. He shall deliver them from the wicked, and save them because they trust in Him” (v39-40).*

Believers should not lose faith because of the success of the wicked.

## Practical Application

**Psalm 37:4 is not a “blank check” for all believers.**

*“Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart.”*

Does verse 34 mean that if I really desire to be a billionaire, it will happen? What about becoming taller or better looking? No! Why not? Because Psalm 37:4 is not a “blank check”!

The point of verse 34 is that if you delight yourself in the Lord, then **your desires will gradually fall into line with His desires, and His plans, and His will for your life.** If our goal is to desire what God desires, then verse 34 is a wonderful promise in the Word of God. And it’s a promise without exceptions!

But is there any believer who is **100% committed** to seek and follow the desires of the Lord – who has absolutely **no selfish hidden agendas** whatsoever?

So remember - Psalm 37:4 is **not** a blank check for all believers!