

Psalm 37

God is our confidence in times of trouble

Introduction

Some Bibles have the footnote that this is an acrostic poem, the stanzas of which begin with the successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Each of the stanzas (roughly, Hebrew stanzas are two verses in the English translation) begins with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Other acrostic psalms are Psalms 25, 119 and 145.

This Psalm is very appropriate in times like these when wickedness abounds and society is breaking up under its power. Questions get raised in our minds or in public – why do the wicked get away with it? Why do God's people suffer? This is not a new problem. God's people have had to wrestle with this down the ages.

Very real problem for Bible writers. In the Bible we meet tortured souls in bitter experiences. Facts of life challenge their beliefs. Experience does not fit what they have been brought up to believe. Particularly acute in the Old Testament because God's revelation was not complete. He only gradually reveals His character and purposes. So the Old Testament gives us partial answers to the problem.

Psalm 37 deals with the problem of the wicked prospering. In Psalm 73, the Psalmist almost loses his faith that God governs justly. In Psalm 37 there is a simple solution – the wicked will soon be cut off and the righteous will be rewarded. Meanwhile, put your trust in God and He will bless. True in many cases, but some evildoers are not always quickly punished. Psalm 73 is a step forward. The Psalmist still expects evildoers to be punished, but he rises above the problem through his fellowship with God. Also, he realised the latter end of the wicked when he went into sanctuary (Psalm 73:17). The Book of Job takes the matter further, illustrating how godly people suffer to prove their devotion to God.

So the Old Testament raises problems and some partial answers are given. But the full and final revelation is found in Christ, **Seen the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus** (2 Corinthians 4:6). In Christ is seen the full revelation of future life with rewards and punishments. Also Christ is the greatest example of innocent suffering. He was the only perfectly innocent person and he suffered – bearing in mind His spiritual as well as His physical suffering – at a level greater than anyone else.

Yet the Cross is transformed, in being God's instrument for the world's salvation. However, even today with fuller light, we are not able to explain the reason for suffering in many individual cases – but we know enough of God in Christ to enable us to trust where we cannot explain.

So Psalm 37 is one of the partial answers in the Old Testament. Emphasis is put on trust in God, be obedient regardless of others. Be sure God will not forsake you. And these things are always true and to be followed, even though the Psalmist's answer to the suffering problem only fits some cases.

Another Psalm written from maturity of old age as a man reviews his life. The key to peace of mind in all complexities and set backs of daily life is that God is trustworthy. He will not let you down. So this Psalm deals with how to face life's experience. (1) Commit your ways to God, (2) do God's will regardless of others, and (3) blessings which the godly man may expect.

Leave everything we cannot control with the Lord

Do not fret because of evil men, or be envious of those who do wrong (Psalm 37:1). On many occasions the NIV translates the verb used here as “burn” and “flare up”, i.e. “do not lose temper”, “keep your cool”. **Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; Do not fret – it leads only to evil** (Psalm 37:8). It is a waste of time and cannot alter the situation. Let God deal with the situation – you cannot. Evil men will come to an end. That is true from the perspective of eternity. But we have to face the fact that it does not always happen next week.

Then act positively. **Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart** (Psalm 37:4). The Hebrew means “rejoice in”, “take pleasure”, and “find enjoyment” in the Lord. When we are taken up with God, and when He means everything to us, we want nothing contrary to His will. We want what He wants. And so we always get it. We will want to please Him, glorify Him, and grow in holiness and grace and usefulness. “To conquer we must replace”, so when worked up about our enemies – put mind on something else, redirect emotions, focus on the Lord.

Commit your way to the Lord (Psalm 37:5). Roll the burden of life onto Him – everything – your career, future, and your reputation, “the justice of your cause” (Psalm 37:6). Quiet confidence in His guidance. The desert will not be trackless, you will be shown the way. **Trust in him and he will do this** (Psalm 37:5b). **Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for Him** (Psalm 37:7). God is working on bigger time scale than we are, and He sees the whole picture. He will not be hustled by our haste.

Leave issues of life in God's hands. Don't panic or imagine God has lost control. Take burden of life off own shoulders and put it on God's. Roll it on to God – roll up your responsibilities, fears, plans, Christian service, present, future, possessions, loved ones. It will save you worrying, fretting, and spare you the burden of running own life and taking all responsibilities on your own shoulders. Hands off these things and hands of selves. Commit without reserve and in confidence to God. Renounce all self-confidence and reliance on your own strength and will. Look to God alone.

David Livingstone – these verses sustained him through his wanderings when he disappeared in trackless solitudes and savage wildernesses. F.R.Havergal – six years before her death she entered new and deeper phase in her relationship to God, but her newfound peace was soon tested. A publisher in the USA went bankrupt, but calmly accepted that “God's will is not a sigh but a song”. God never fails to respond to trust. “Leaving everything to him is so inexpressibly sweet, and surely he does arrange so much than we could for ourselves when we leave it all to him” [author of this quote is not recorded.]

Live in God's will regardless of what others do

Stay in the place where God has put you, and do God's will there. What sort of character does the godly man demonstrate when wickedness abounds and moral chaos is everywhere? **The righteous give generously** (Psalm 37:21). **They are always generous and lend freely** (Psalm 37:25). **Do good** (Psalm 37:27). **The righteous man utters wisdom** (Psalm 37:30). **The law of his God is in his heart** (Psalm 37:31). Not grim duty of doing what God expects. But love for God's law. "In his heart", wanting to please God and keep His law. **Wait for the Lord and keep his law** (Psalm 37:34). Walk the path marked out for us in His word and His will. When we live like that, God's blessing rests on us. **Consider the blameless, observe the upright** (Psalm 37:37). God's blessing extends beyond death. Man's way may be rough but leads home to God. There is a call here to be single-minded and simply live in God's will. In light of the judgement seat and of eternity, it will soon be apparent who has chosen the better part.

Blessings which the man of God may expect to enjoy

God is no man's debtor. Even here on earth and in this life – God's hand for good is on us. Three blessings that God will endow, whatever life may bring.

- (a) Provision for all need (if not all our wants). **The meek will inherit the land and enjoy great peace** (Psalm 37:11). The humble will live for as long as it is for their good. They will be content – **Better the little that the righteous have than the wealth of many wicked** (Psalm 37:16). Peace of conscience here, and then glory in the next life. **Their inheritance will endure forever** (Psalm 37:18). **In days of famine they will enjoy plenty** (Psalm 37:19). Looking back over his long life, the Psalmist is able to testify; **I have never seen the righteous forsaken, or their children begging bread** (Psalm 37:25). **The Lord will not forsake his faithful ones** (Psalm 37:28). This reminds us of Jesus' promise, **Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well** (Matthew 6:33). The righteous man may not have all he wants, but he will have all he needs. And there are spiritual compensations here and hereafter – he will be beyond condemnation. **They will be protected forever** (Psalm 37:28). Thousands have testified to the truth of these words over the years.
- (b) God's guidance. **If the Lord delights in a man's way, He makes his steps firm** (Psalm 37:23). The Hebrew means "directed", or "fastened". Keep to God's way, go in the right direction, and do not wander off the course. God will graciously direct your life. You will not be ruled by or at the mercy of chance or bad luck.
- (c) Upheld by God. **Though he stumble, he will not fall, for the Lord upholds him with his hand** (Psalm 37:24). We may meet disasters but we will not be overwhelmed or crushed. We may be on our knees, but will not fall on our face. May fall on the deck, but not overboard. Bereavement or ill health or set back and disappointment can deal many a cruel blow to the believer. Futile to deny their reality and effect. But we will not be finally crushed and ruined. Rather, we will be upheld by God's sustaining hand. **I will never (οὐ μὴ) leave you nor forsake (οὐδ' οὐ μὴ) you** (Hebrews 13:6). – the Greek reveals a five-fold negative.

J.G.Paton, missionary to the cannibals on the South Sea Island of Tanna – his wife died in childbirth, and 17 days later the baby died. Paton had to dig their graves himself. He recorded, “But for Jesus and the fellowship He vouchsafed me there, I must have gone mad and died beside that lonely grave.” He could echo the great words with which the Psalmist concludes, **The Lord is their stronghold in time of trouble. The Lord helps them and delivers them** (Psalm 37:39,40).

Conclusion

In this topsy-turvy world everything can seem upside down. We are not to get over worried. Leave the worrying to God. Commit your way to God. Roll everything onto Him. Do your duties and enjoy His blessings.

Luther’s summary of this Psalm: “Learn patience. Cast your cares on the Lord. Do not be angry. Wish no ill to the wicked. Leave management and government of all to God.”

Five key words from this Psalm which teach us how we should live: Trust, Delight, Commit, Rest and Wait.