

## PSALM THIRTY-SEVEN

### PSALM 37

#### DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

An Alphabetical Exhortation to Patience in Well-Doing, notwithstanding the Temporary Prosperity of the Lawless.

#### ANALYSIS

It is not easy to resolve this psalm into any other stanzas than those small ones formed by the Letters of the Hebrew Alphabet. The Chief Burden of the psalm is the Seeming Inequity of the Divine Treatment of the Righteous and the Wicked: for the removal of which a Time-Solution is mainly relied on (see "Exposition"), while various Other Qualifying Considerations are Suggested.

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(Lm.)—By David.

- 1 Do not burn with vexation because of evil-doers,  
be not envious of the workers of perversity;
- 2 For like grass will they speedily wither,  
and like fresh grass will they fade.
- 3 Trust in Jehovah and do good,  
settle down in the earth<sup>1</sup> and pasture with confidence;
- 4 So shalt thou find exquisite delight in Jehovah,  
and he will give thee the requests of thy heart.
- 5 Roll on Jehovah thy way,  
trust thou also in him,—and he will effectually work;
- 6 So will he bring forth as the light thy righteousness,  
and thy justice<sup>2</sup> as noon-day.
- 7 Be still<sup>3</sup> as to Jehovah, and wait longingly for him;  
do not burn with vexation at him who is making prosperous  
his way,  
at the man who is bringing wicked devices to pass.
- 8 Desist from anger and forsake wrath,  
do not burn with vexation at the doing of evil;<sup>4</sup>

1. Or: "land," and so throughout, vers. 9, 11, 22, 29, 34. All depends on the breadth of the outlook.

2. Or: "vindication."

3. Dr.: "resigned."

4. So w. Br.

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- 9 For evil-doers shall be cut off,  
but they who wait for Jehovah—they shall inherit the earth.
- 10 Yet a little then and the lawless one will not be,  
though thou attentively consider his place yet will he not be;
- 11 But humble ones shall inherit the earth,  
and find exquisite delight in the abundance of prosperity.
- 12 Plotting is a lawless man against a righteous,  
and gnashing at him with his teeth:
- 13 My Sovereign Lord will laugh at him,  
for he seeth that his day will come.
- 14 A sword have lawless men drawn out,  
and have trodden their bow;  
to bring down the humbled and needy,  
to slaughter the upright in life:<sup>1</sup>
- 15 Their sword shall enter their own heart,  
and their bows shall be broken.
- 16 Better the little of a righteous man  
than the abundance of many lawless;
- 17 For the arms of lawless men shall be broken,  
but an upholder of righteous men is Jehovah.
- 18 Jehovah knoweth the days of the blameless,  
and their inheritance to the ages<sup>2</sup> shall be:
- 19 They shall not be put to shame in the time of calamity,  
but in the days of famine shall they be satisfied.
- 20 For the lawless shall perish,  
and the enemies of Jehovah shall be cut off:  
Yea while in high esteem while exalted have they vanished,  
like smoke have they vanished.<sup>3</sup>
- 21 A lawless man borroweth and doth not repay,  
but a righteous man is gracious and giveth.
- 22 For such as are blessed of him shall inherit the earth,  
but such as are accursed of him shall be cut off.
- 23 Of Jehovah are a man's steps rendered firm,  
when in his way he taketh pleasure:
- 24 Though he fall he shall not be cast headlong,  
for Jehovah is upholding his hand.
- 25 Young have I been, and now am old,

Cp. 1. Or: "behaviour." *Ms.*: "way." Some *cod.* (*w. Sep. and Vul.*): "heart."

2. *Ms.* "to concealed duration."

3. So in the main, *w. Br.*, after *Sep.*

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- yet have I not seen a righteous man forsaken  
 or his seed begging bread:
- 26 All day long is he gracious and bending,  
 and his seed is for a blessing.
- 27 Depart from evil and do good,  
 and settle down to the ages;<sup>1</sup>
- 28 For Jehovah loveth justice,  
 and will not forsake his men of kindness.  
 To the ages<sup>1</sup> have perverse men been destroyed,<sup>2</sup>  
 and the seed of lawless men hath been cut off:
- 29 Righteous men shall inherit the earth,  
 and settle down to futurity thereon.
- 30 The mouth of a righteous man talketh to him<sup>3</sup> of wisdom,  
 and his tongue speaketh of justice:
- 31 The law of his God is in his heart,  
 his steps shall not slide.
- 32 A lawless man spieth upon a righteous,  
 and seeketh to put him to death:
- 33 Jehovah will not leave him in his hand,  
 nor condemn him when he is judged.
- 34 Wait thou for Jehovah and observe his way,  
 and he will exalt thee to inherit the earth:  
 on the cutting off of lawless men shalt thou gaze.
- 35 I have seen a lawless man ruthless,<sup>4</sup>  
 and spreading himself out like a cedar of Lebanon;<sup>5</sup>
- 36 Then have I<sup>6</sup> passed by and lo! he was not,  
 yea I sought him and he was not to be found.
- 37 Mark the blameless man and behold the upright,  
 for there is a future for the man of peace;<sup>7</sup>
- 38 But transgressors have been destroyed together,  
 the future of lawless men hath been cut off.
- 39 But the salvation of righteous men is from Jehovah,  
 their stronghold in the time of distress;

1. *MI.*: "to concealed duration."

2. So it shd. be (*w. Sep., Vul.*); cp. v. 38—*Gn.*

3. *Or.*: "soliloquiseth."

4. "As a terrible one"—*Dr.*

5. So it shd. be (*w. Sep., Syr.*); cp. Hosea 14:6—*Gn.*

6. So it shd. be (*w. Aram., Sep., Vul.*)—*Gn.*

7. By general consent, this is the true construction of the sentence: "the man of peace" is the "subject," of whom something is affirmed. As to what that something is, see above rendering and the "Exposition."

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40 And Jehovah will help them and deliver them,  
will deliver them from lawless men and will save them,  
because they have taken refuge in him.

(Nm.)

### PARAPHRASE

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Never envy the wicked!

2 Soon they fade away like grass and disappear.

3 Trust in the Lord instead. Be kind and good to others;  
then you will live safely here in the land and prosper, feeding  
in safety.

4 Be delighted with the Lord! Then He will give you all  
your heart's desires.

5 Commit everything you do to the Lord. Trust Him to help  
you do it and He will.

6 Your innocence will be clear to everyone. He will vindicate  
you with the blazing light of justice shining down as from  
the noonday sun.

7 Rest in the Lord; wait patiently for Him to act. Don't  
be envious of evil men who prosper.

8 Stop your anger! Turn off your wrath. Don't fret and  
worry—it only leads to harm.

9 For the wicked shall be destroyed, but those who trust  
the Lord shall be given every blessing.

10 Only a little while and the wicked shall disappear. You  
will look for them in vain.

11 But all who humble themselves before the Lord shall be  
given every blessing, and shall have wonderful peace.

12, 13 The Lord is laughing at those who plot against the  
godly, for He knows their judgment day is coming.

14 Evil men take aim to slay the poor; they are ready to  
butcher those who do right.

15 But their swords will be plunged into their own hearts  
and all their weapons will be broken.

16 It is better to have little and be godly than to own an  
evil man's wealth;

17 For the strength of evil men shall be broken, but the  
Lord takes care of those He has forgiven.<sup>1</sup>

1. Literally, "the righteous."

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18 Day by day the Lord observes the good deeds done by godly men,<sup>1</sup> and gives them eternal rewards.

19 He cares for them when times are hard; even in famine, they will have enough.

20 But evil men shall perish. These enemies of God will wither like grass, and disappear like smoke.

21 Evil men borrow and "cannot pay it back"! But the good man returns what he owes with some extra besides.

22 Those blessed by the Lord shall inherit the earth; but those cursed by Him shall die.

23 The steps of good men are directed by the Lord. He delights in each step they take.

24 If they fall it isn't fatal, for the Lord holds them with His hand.

25 I have been young and now I am old. And in all my years I have never seen the Lord forsake a man who loves Him; nor have I seen the children of the godly go hungry.

26 Instead, the godly are able to be generous with their gifts and loans to others, and their children are a blessing.

27 So if you want an eternal home leave your evil, low-down ways and live good lives.

28 For the Lord loves justice and fairness; He will never abandon His people. They will be kept safe forever; but all who love wickedness shall perish.

29 The godly shall be firmly planted in the land, and live there forever.

30, 31 The godly man is a good counselor because he is just and fair and knows right from wrong.

32 Evil men spy on the godly, waiting for an excuse to accuse them and then demanding their death!

33 But the Lord will not let these evil men succeed, or let the godly be condemned when they are brought before the judge.

34 Don't be impatient for the Lord to act! Keep steadily along His pathway and in due season He will honor you with every blessing,<sup>2</sup> and you will see the wicked destroyed.

35, 36 I myself have seen it happen: a proud and evil man, towering like a cedar of Lebanon, but when I looked again, he was gone! I searched but could not find him!

37 But the good man—what a different story! For the good

1. Literally, "knows the days of the upright."

2. Literally, "to possess the land."

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man—the blameless, the upright, the man of peace—he has a wonderful future ahead of him. For him there is a happy ending.

38 But evil men shall be destroyed, and their posterity shall be cut off.

39 The Lord saves the godly! He is their salvation and their refuge when trouble comes.

40 Because they trust in Him, He helps them and delivers them from the plots of evil men.

## EXPOSITION

While the artificial character of this psalm as an *alphabetical acrostic*, and its practical aim to encourage saints in well-doing, fully account for all that is discursive in it; it is obviously weighted with the great moral problem—How to account for the undeniable facts, that the lawless are often prosperous in life, whereas the righteous are not infrequently called to pass through adversity. How these facts can be reconciled with the gracious equity of God, is a problem which in all ages has perplexed observant and thoughtful minds; and many parts of Holy Scripture are devoted to endeavours to solve the problem; among them, the book of Job and several psalms are conspicuous. Among such psalms, this one and Pss. 49 and 73 are worthy of special mention; the present one being remarkable for its buoyant courage in confronting the difficulty; the 49th, for the beauty of its form in stating the problem and the unexpected and irregular way in which its solution is proposed; and the 73rd, for the revelation it makes of a soul's struggles before it successfully rises above doubt. They are indeed a remarkable triad of psalms, specially devoted to this very grave, but yet most fascinating theme.

This psalm boldly meets the difficulty by presenting *time* as the chief solution. Subsidiary mitigations, no doubt, are simultaneously presented, to console the suffering saint; and among them is discovered the enhanced delight found in Jehovah himself which significantly anticipates the same mighty consolation which comes out so triumphantly in Ps. 73 the third of the series. But the dominant exhortation here turns on the question of *time*: the burden of the advice tendered being this: "Wait! All will come right in the end. The triumph of the flourishing lawless will be short. When he has been *cut off*, thou, O patient wronged one, will be inheriting the earth." This is the note

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struck at the beginning of the psalm, and this carries us through up to the climax at its close: a climax which confessedly comes with all the greater force when the crowning words are adequately translated: *There is a future for the man of peace; But transgressors have been destroyed together, the future of lawless men hath been cut off.* This forms a worthy climax to the psalm, and adequately meets the difficulty calling for solution. Only grant that there is a *future* for the patient well-doer; and that, for the lawless, however long they may live and flourish, there is *no future* worthy of the name,—and the solution is felt to be complete.

It is true, indeed, that the edge of the psalmist's argument has been rather blunted by critics of note through their acceptance of the term "posterity," in place of *future*, in vers. 37 and 38. To such a weakening of the solution it may be permitted us to object, for two or three reasons: *first*, that the main current of the psalm points to survival in person rather than by proxy; *second*, that in the parallel use of the same word (*aharith*) in Ps. 73:17 it is impossible to accept "posterity" as an adequate translation, seeing that, there, the writer's resolve is to enter "the great sanctuary" for the purpose of considering, not the "posterity" of the lawless but their own *latter end* or *hereafter* or *future*, as the sequel to that passage conclusively shows; and *third*, that the prophetic word itself elsewhere—notably in Jer. 31:29, 30 and Eze. 18:1-4—expressly discounts the principle of punishment by proxy, so making it exceedingly unlikely that this far-seeing and forth-reaching psalm intends us to be content with either substitutionary punishment or substitutionary reward. Hence, as "posterity" is by no means the primary or customary meaning of *aharith*, we can confidently rely on the solid reasons above given for declining it; and for preferring the well-sustained rendering which concludes the psalm with such fine effect.

Will it be objected, that the rewards of the righteous appear in this psalm to be too earthly to be eternal, and the punishment of the lawless to be too summary to be final? Such objection may be safely dismissed as virtually demanding that no Old Testament rays shall penetrate the great Hereafter unless they flood it with all-revealing light. What if the heaven of the Old Testament, as well as that of the New, should prove to be a heaven upon earth? and what if the expansion of the hints here discovered should, after all, find room for all the details subsequently revealed? If we at all apprehend that God hath yet

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more light to break forth from his word, let us beware of closing up the very avenues by which that light may reach us!

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. "Never envy the wicked". This is well enough to say—how do we know we are envying, or not envying the wicked? Discuss.
2. The seeds of self-destruction are planted in the actions of the wicked—so what is the responsibility of the believer?
3. Waiting is the most difficult of our responses to God's will—why?
4. Anger—wrath—worry—fretting—all these lead to harm. Name and discuss the specific harm involved.
5. The promises to the godly are numerous notice verses: 3, 4, 5, 6, 11, 16, 18, 19, 21, 23—here are ten and we are only half-way through the psalm—so what?
6. There was a man in the Old Testament who faced and answered the basic problem of this psalm—what was his name and what was his answer?
7. Someone well said that "evil is mortal, and righteousness is immortal"—what are the implications of this truth?
8. God has a sense of humor—read verses 12 and 13 to see what makes God laugh—is He laughing at our problem? Cf. Psalms 2:9.
9. If the moral principle of retribution was not at work, history would have no meaning and the present-day utter pessimism would have real relevance—Discuss.
10. Read verses 32-40 to obtain a summary and final answer to the problem here discussed.

## PSALM 38

### DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

Prayer for Deliverance from Disease and from Enemies.

### ANALYSIS

Part I. *Against Disease.* Stanza I., vers 1, 2, Jehovah's Anger Deprecated. Stanza II., ver. 3-5, The Psalmist traces his Disease to his Sin. Stanza