

## The Meek Inherit the Earth

### Psalm 37

Turn to Psalm 37. I have in mind that we are beginning a new year. This psalm is for those of us who get worked up by all the things going wrong in the world around us, those of us who get riled and angry. This psalm is also for those of us who are anxious and worried about all that's wrong in the world around us. Anger and fear are both sensible reactions to the world around us.

Psalm 37 is a wisdom psalm, that means it teaches us how to live. Wisdom in the Bible means living in God's ways. Psalm 37 assumes that the world is a pretty bad place, and it tells us how to live in a world like that. Psalm 37 shows us a better way than either anger or fear. Those both make sense, the world is dangerous, but we can live better than that.

Psalm 37 is an acrostic poem. The Hebrew alphabet has 22 letters, so Psalm 37 has 22 little stanzas, the first letter of each being consecutive letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

One more thing: five times this psalm says that God's people will "inherit the land": vv9, 11, 22, 29, and 34. I have changed "land" to "earth." The Hebrew word, *aretz*, can mean either "land" or "earth." When this psalm was composed, they understood "land" to be the land of Israel.

But Genesis 1 says that in the beginning God made the heavens and the earth, and *aretz* is the word for the whole earth. When Isaiah 65 speaks of the new heavens and new earth, Isaiah uses *aretz* for "earth." When Jesus says that the meek will inherit the earth, he means inherit the whole earth. So we will read "inherit the earth" instead of "inherit the land."

**Ps 37 – This Psalm Answers two questions: How shall the righteous live in a nasty world? And, how will it all end?**

*<sup>1</sup> Do not fret because of those who are evil, or be envious of those who do wrong; for like the grass they will soon wither, like green plants they will soon die away.*

*<sup>3</sup> Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.*

*<sup>5</sup> Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him and he will do this: He will make your righteous reward shine like the dawn, your vindication like the noonday sun.*

*<sup>7</sup> Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; do not fret when people succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes.*

*<sup>8</sup> Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret—it leads only to evil. For those who are evil will be destroyed, but those who hope in the Lord will inherit the earth.*

<sup>10</sup> *A little while, and the wicked will be no more; though you look for them, they will not be found. But the meek will inherit the earth and enjoy peace and prosperity.*

<sup>12</sup> *The wicked plot against the righteous and gnash their teeth at them; but the Lord laughs at the wicked, for he knows their day is coming.*

<sup>14</sup> *The wicked draw the sword and bend the bow to bring down the poor and needy, to slay those whose ways are upright. But their swords will pierce their own hearts, and their bows will be broken.*

<sup>16</sup> *Better the little that the righteous have than the wealth of many wicked; for the power of the wicked will be broken, but the Lord upholds the righteous.*

<sup>18</sup> *The blameless spend their days under the Lord's care, and their inheritance will endure forever. In times of disaster they will not wither; in days of famine they will enjoy plenty.*

<sup>20</sup> *But the wicked will perish: Though the Lord's enemies are like the flowers of the field, they will be consumed; they will go up in smoke.*

<sup>21</sup> *The wicked borrow and do not repay, but the righteous give generously; those the Lord blesses will inherit the earth, but those he curses will be destroyed.*

<sup>23</sup> *The Lord makes firm the steps of the one who delights in him; though he may stumble, he will not fall, for the Lord upholds him with his hand.*

<sup>25</sup> *I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread. They are always generous and lend freely; their children will be a blessing.*

<sup>27</sup> *Turn from evil and do good; then you will dwell in the land forever.*

<sup>28</sup> *For the Lord loves the just and will not forsake his faithful ones.*

*Wrongdoers will be completely destroyed; the offspring of the wicked will perish.*

<sup>29</sup> *The righteous will inherit the earth and dwell in it forever.*

<sup>30</sup> *The mouths of the righteous utter wisdom, and their tongues speak what is just. The law of their God is in their hearts; their feet do not slip.*

<sup>32</sup> *The wicked lie in wait for the righteous, intent on putting them to death; but the Lord will not leave them in the power of the wicked, or let them be condemned when brought to trial.*

<sup>34</sup> *Hope in the Lord and keep his way. He will exalt you to inherit the earth; when the wicked are destroyed, you will see it.*

<sup>35</sup> *I have seen a wicked and ruthless man flourishing like a luxuriant native tree, but he soon passed away and was no more; though I looked for him, he could not be found.*

<sup>37</sup> *Consider the blameless, observe the upright; a future awaits those who seek peace. But all sinners will be destroyed; there will be no future for the wicked.*

<sup>39</sup> *The salvation of the righteous comes from the Lord; he is their stronghold in time of trouble. The Lord helps them and delivers them; he delivers them from the wicked and saves them, because they take refuge in him.*

We've read all 22 stanzas; I'm going to go over the first six, and four more, ten in all.

### **1 Don't fret, Evil won't Last (Ps 37:1–2)**

*Do not fret because of those who are evil, or be envious of those who do wrong; for like the grass they will soon wither, like green plants they will soon die away.*

Don't fret (3x, vv1, 7, 8). People, we have some control over our thinking. We DON'T have to keep spinning the same thoughts around and around in our minds. We don't have complete control over our minds, but we can do things to get off a mental path of fretting. God says: there are people and systems that are evil and wrong, and they will wither and die. According to v34, you will be there to watch their destruction. Don't fret, and don't envy what they have.

### **2 Trust in the Lord and Do Good (Ps 37:2–3)**

*Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.*

If we decide not to fret, what then? Trust in the Lord and do good. When evil people and wrong doers are around, we show that trust God by not fretting, and doing good instead. Keep living in God's ways. And if the anger or fear is intense and distracting, then do something good right away! Find some action that's helpful, and get up and do it. Trust in the Lord and do good! Now!

There are five "God" lines like this in our psalm: (1) V3 - Trust in the Lord and do good; (2) V4 - Take delight in the Lord; (3) V5 - Commit your way to the Lord; (4) V7 - Be still before the Lord and wait patiently; (5) V34 - Hope in the Lord and keep his way.

"Take delight in the Lord" means what the other four say, especially the first and the last: "trust in the Lord and do good." "Hope in the Lord and keep his way." We do these instead of fretting.

When we talk about what angers us, or what scares us, usually God is not in the story. But folks, God is always in the story, always in that hard story. That's where this psalm is trying to take us.

### **3. Vindication like the Noonday Sun (37:5–6)**

*Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him and he will do this:*

*He will make your righteous reward shine like the dawn, your vindication like the noonday sun.*

Commit your way to the Lord. “Lord, my life is in your hands, I’ll trust you to lead me in the right paths.” If your response to evil around you is to trust in the Lord and do good, he will show everyone how right you were. Your reward will shine like the dawn.

Now, you may look foolish for trusting in the Lord and doing good. Perhaps people humiliate you. But on that day, God will pour out glory on you. Why? Because you committed your way to the Lord, and you trusted in him. Trusting God and doing good is never, never a mistake. Hoping in God and keeping his way is never a mistake. God is completely and utterly reliable.

### **4. Be Still, Wait Patiently, Don’t Fret (37:7)**

*Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; do not fret when people succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes.*

When we are told to be still and wait patiently, it doesn’t mean we sit and do nothing. It means we trust in the Lord and do good, we hope in the Lord and keep his way. That is our response when evil people succeed in their ways, when they carry out wicked schemes. We wait quietly and patiently for God to deal with the evil people. Easy to say, hard to do. When they succeed, be still before God. Wait patiently for God. Don’t fret when they carry out their dark plans.

### **5. Refrain from Anger and Turn from Wrath (37:8)**

*Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret—it leads only to evil.*

*For those who are evil will be destroyed, but those who hope in the Lord will inherit the earth.*

The previous line said “be still before the Lord, wait patiently for him.” This line fills that out. That means, refrain from anger and turn from wrath. When evil people succeed, “be still, wait patiently, refrain from anger, turn from wrath, and do not fret. FOR, God will destroy those who are evil, and those who hope in the Lord will inherit the earth.” Those people *are* evil, and you *are* right that they should be destroyed. God thinks so too, and he has it in hand.

Here is a remarkable line – “*those who hope in the Lord will inherit the earth.*” Hoping in the Lord means being still and patient when wicked schemes succeed. The patient will inherit the earth. The quiet patient ones who hoped in God and did good will rule the earth, and the evil people won’t even be there, they’ll be destroyed. And we will see that happen (v34).

This is a complete reversal of what’s normal. Look around you. What are the chances that those who trust God and do good will rule earth?

What are the chances that those who do *not* fret about evil people and dark schemes will inherit the earth? They will, because our God is going to make it happen.

### **6. The Meek will Inherit the Earth (37:10–11)**

*A little while, and the wicked will be no more; though you look for them, they will not be found. But the meek will inherit the earth and enjoy peace and prosperity.*

Jesus got his third beatitude from this line. This whole psalm is a commentary on “the meek will inherit the earth.” Five times this psalm says that the righteous will inherit the earth: vv9, 11, 22, 29, 34. Inheriting the earth is the main reward for us not getting rattled by evil people. The problem with evil people and wicked schemes is that they indeed want to rule the earth, and they seem to be succeeding. That’s why we fret, and rage, and fear.

But something that makes no sense will happen. The meek will inherit the earth. They will not conquer earth. Being meek is not a secret plan to dominate. The earth belongs to God, and he will give it to whomever he chooses. Want to inherit the earth? Don’t fret about evil. Trust in the Lord and do good. Don’t fret about dark plans. Hope in the Lord and keep his way.

### **7. The One who Delights in the Lord Will not Fall (37:23–24)**

*The Lord makes firm the steps of the one who delights in him; though he may stumble, he will not fall, for the Lord upholds him with his hand.*

To delight in the Lord means these other lines we’ve read: Trust in the Lord and do good; Commit your way to the Lord; Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; Hope in the Lord and keep his way.

Most of the psalm builds on the future destruction of the wicked, and our future inheritance of earth. This stanza promises God’s care in the present. “If you hope in me and keep my ways,” says God, “If you take refuge in me, I will make your steps firm. You may stumble but you won’t fall, because I’m holding you up with my hand. I will make your steps firm, I will hold you up.”

### **8. The Lord Loves the Just (37:27–28)**

<sup>27</sup> *Turn from evil and do good; then you will dwell in the land forever.*

<sup>28</sup> *For the Lord loves the just and will not forsake his faithful ones.*

Hebrew has two words for “love.” The more famous is *hesed*, God’s covenant loyalty, family loyalty, his steadfast love, his unfailing love. Almost always when we read about God’s love in Psalms, the Hebrew word is *hesed*.

The other word for “love” is *ahav*, which is can be romantic love. Song of Songs is full of *ahav*. Jacob loved Rachel and worked for her for seven years – that’s *ahav*. God said to Abraham, “Take your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac.” That love is *ahav*. *Ahav* is closer to what we usually mean in English when we say “love.” Strong warm affection and longing.

*Ahav* is the word in v28. Turn from evil and do good, and it will go very well for you. Why? Because the Lord loves people like that, and will never forsake them. Never. He loves them. Strong affection and longing. What kind of people? The ones this psalm has been describing all along – they turn from evil and do good. He loves them and will never forsake them.

### **9. The Whole Psalm in One Stanza (37:34)**

<sup>34</sup> *Hope in the Lord and keep his way.*

*He will exalt you to inherit the earth; when the wicked are destroyed, you will see it.*

What are we going to do about evil people and wicked schemes, especially when they are succeeding? Instead of fretting, we will hope in the Lord and keep his way. Stay on the path of basic godliness. He will exalt us, we will inherit the earth. And when the wicked are destroyed, we will see it. Let’s hope in the Lord and keep his way *and leave the rest to him*.

### **10. Because They take Refuge in Him (37:39–40)**

<sup>39</sup> *The salvation of the righteous comes from the Lord; he is their stronghold in time of trouble.*

*The Lord helps them and delivers them; he delivers them from the wicked and saves them, because they take refuge in him.*

The righteous have troubles. This psalm assumes that. We read earlier that the righteous stumble. But the Maker of heaven and earth is active here. He’s our stronghold, he helps us and delivers us, he saves us. Why? Because we take refuge in him.

People, we don’t have to fix this place. That’s God’s job. God will rescue this earth. Our job is to turn from evil and do good, to refrain from evil and turn from wrath, don’t fret. Our job is to trust in the Lord and do good, to hope in the Lord and keep his way. It’s all under control.

The Sermon the Mount, the Lord’s teaching on discipleship essentials, says pretty much the same thing. Ours is the kingdom of heaven, and we will inherit the earth.

Evil people and wicked schemes aren’t the only problems that cause us to fret. We have more personal weaknesses and troubles that will not go away. We stew and fret about them. Some of them big, and bring us a lot of distress, and we don’t really have any control over them.

Perhaps we could just trust in the Lord and do good. Perhaps we could wait patiently for the Lord to deal with this. Perhaps it could be enough to hope in the Lord and keep his ways as much as we are able. Perhaps this is all he wants. This psalm sounds to me like God is saying, “Trust me and do the good you can, and I’ll take care of the rest. Be patient, I’ll take care of the rest. You’re going to inherit the earth.” Amen.

PRAYER: God, you’ve given us something here to take hold of. We’re afraid to take hold of this, we’re not sure we can trust you. O God, we believe, help our unbelief. We want to take hold of this, we want to grab it and run with it. Thank you for such kind and calming words. May the one who calls us be faithful to do it. Amen.

BENEDICTION: May the Lord direct your hearts into God’s love and into Christ’s perseverance. May the Lord of peace give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you. Amen. Go in God’s peace to love and serve the Lord.