

Ponderings in the Psalms

The following is a Messianic Study on

Psalm 37

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Brit Chadashah (Sydney)

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ברית חדשה

The *Pondering* studies were published in the Brit Chadashah Newsletter. Brit Chadashah (*New Covenant*) is a Messianic Fellowship in Sydney. Led by Paul Cohen a Jewish believer in Messiah Yeshua (Jesus). We meet together fortnightly for Bible studies from a Messianic Jewish Perspective. We are a unique fellowship made up of Jewish and Gentile people who are believers in Yeshua as the promised Messiah of Israel.

If you don't know Yeshua as your Messiah, we encourage you to search out the Scriptures for yourself. God promised in the book of Jeremiah, "*You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart*" (Jeremiah 29:13). And we hope you will make contact with us so that we can share more about the Messiah, His life and ministry.

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Pondering Psalm 37

Intro

As this is a long psalm I will only summarise the segments and focus on a few aspects.

1 A Psalm of David. Do not fret because of evildoers, Be not envious toward wrongdoers. **2** For they will wither quickly like the grass And fade like the green herb. **3** Trust in the Lord and do good; Dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness. **4** Delight yourself in the Lord; And He will give you the desires of your heart. **5** Commit your way to the Lord, Trust also in Him, and He will do it. **6** He will bring forth your righteousness as the light And your judgment as the noonday. **7** 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 carries out wicked schemes. **8** Cease from anger and forsake wrath; Do not fret; it leads only to evildoing.

9 For evildoers will be cut off, But those who wait for the Lord, they will inherit the land. **10** Yet a little while and the wicked man will be no more; And you will look carefully for his place and he will not be there. **11** But the humble will inherit the land And will delight themselves in abundant prosperity. **12** The wicked plots against the righteous And gnashes at him with his teeth. **13** The Lord laughs at him, For He sees his day is coming. **14** The wicked have drawn the sword and bent their bow To cast down the afflicted and the needy, To slay those who are upright in conduct. **15** Their sword will enter their own heart, And their bows will be broken. **16** Better is the little of the righteous Than the abundance of many wicked. **17** For the arms of the wicked will be broken, But the Lord sustains the righteous. **18** The Lord knows the days of the blameless, And their inheritance will be forever. **19** They will not be ashamed in the time of evil, And in the days of famine they will have abundance. **20** But the wicked will perish; And the enemies of the Lord will be like the glory of the pastures, They vanish—like smoke they vanish away. **21** The wicked borrows and does not pay back, But the righteous is gracious and gives. **22** For those blessed by Him will inherit the land, But those cursed by Him will be cut off. **23** The steps of a man are established by the Lord, And He delights in his way. **24** When he falls, he will not be hurled headlong, Because the Lord is the One who holds his hand. **25** I have been young and now I am old, Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken Or his descendants begging bread. **26** All day long he is gracious and lends, And his descendants are a blessing. **27** Depart from evil and do good, So you will abide forever. **28** For the Lord loves justice And does not forsake His godly ones; They are preserved forever, But the descendants of the wicked will be cut off. **29** The righteous will inherit the land And dwell in it forever. **30** The mouth of the righteous utters wisdom, And his tongue speaks justice. **31** The law of his God is in his heart; His steps do not slip. **32** The wicked spies upon the righteous And seeks to kill him. **33** The Lord will not leave him in his hand Or let him be condemned when he is judged. **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 will see it. **35** I have seen a wicked, violent man Spreading himself like a luxuriant tree in its native soil. **36** Then he passed away, and lo, he was no more; I sought for him, but he could not be found. **37** Mark the blameless man, and behold the upright; For the man of peace will have a posterity. **38** But transgressors will be altogether destroyed; The posterity of the wicked will be cut off. **39** But the salvation of the righteous is from the Lord; He is their strength in time of trouble. **40** The Lord helps them and delivers them; He delivers them from the wicked and saves them, Because they take refuge in Him.

Introduction

This Psalm is very different from most other Psalms and it reads like a chapter in Proverbs. It is a wisdom or didactic psalm, which means it contains short exhortations and reflections on the life and it gives guidance on how to live a godly life. Like the book of Proverbs, this Psalm should not be seen as God's promises to us. These sayings are general nuggets of wisdom which can help us daily in our lives.

Author & Date

The author is King David, when he is old and advanced in years (Psalm 37:25; 1 Kings 1:1); David dies at the age of 70 (2 Samuel 5:4; Josephus *Antiquities* 7.15.2-3), and was buried in Jerusalem, that is *the city of David* (1 Kings 2:10). Reading all the stories about him, we can say he lived a full life.

Summary

David counsels the faithful not to be jealous of the success of evildoers, but to trust in the LORD, for He will sustain the righteous and will reward them; the transgressors will be cut off and disappear. Since the days of David, there have been some 3000 years, yet these statements are true and have encouraged the faithful across the generations.

A Key phrase

One of the key phrases is “*they will inherit the earth*” (verses 9, 11, 22, 29; verse 34 has a different word for inherit). This is a phrase taken from the Torah (Deuteronomy 10:11), where it contains the promise of possessing (*inheriting*) the Promised Land, a land flowing with milk and honey. David applies that verse to the faithful, those who trust in the LORD and commit their way to Him. This promise is repeated to Israel, but narrowed down to the faithful of Israel (Isaiah 60:21); and it is also the promise to New Covenant believers who will reign on the earth (Revelation 5:10).

Yeshua quoted verse 11 on the sermon He gave on the Mount (Matthew chapters 5, 6, and 7): “*Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.*” On Matthew 5:5 James Boice writes: “That teaching is not explained by Yeshua, certainly not in the Sermon on the Mount. But it is what Psalm 37 is all about. So it is right to say that Psalm 37 is an exposition of the third beatitude, even though it was written a thousand years before Yeshua began His public ministry.”¹

The exhortations to continue to trust (37:1-8)

The righteous person should not envy the wicked, nor should he be troubled over their prosperity. For even if he prospers his entire life, in the light of eternity, it will seem but a moment. Yeshua gives us the story of Lazarus and the rich man in Luke 16:25-26 as an example of this.

On the contrary, believers' lives should be fixed on God. Note the threefold aspect, *trusting*, *delighting* and by *committing our ways* to the Lord. Trust בָּטַח, (*b'tach*) is placing ones confidence in the LORD. Delight חִתְּאָנָה (*hit'anag*) carries the meaning to take pleasure in what the LORD is doing in us and what He wants from us. Finally, commit גָּלַל (*gol*) literally

¹ James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms 1–41: An Expository Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), page 315.

means to *roll away*, but as an expression it means to entrust your life to Him (cf. Proverbs 16:3). In verses 7-8 David restates to stay the course, and not to be distracted by the success of the wicked.

The assurance of rewards for the righteous and the punishment of the wicked (37:9-22)

The Messianic Kingdom

In verses 9-11 David indicates that evil doers will be כָּרַת (*carat*), literally ‘*cut off*’, figuratively ‘*destroyed*’ as the Septuagint (the Greek translation) puts it. By contrast those that wait on the LORD will see the promise of possessing the Land, and this was reaffirmed by Messiah Yeshua (Matthew 5:5). When He comes to establish the Messianic (Millennial) Kingdom, it will be a kingdom marked by the abundance of peace עֲלֵ-רֵב שְׁלוֹם (*al-rov shalom*). In Matthew 5:3 we read *Blessed are the poor in spirit*, that is those who acknowledged their sinful and rebellious state, who have no spiritual assets to contribute to their salvation, and asked Messiah Yeshua to be their saviour and king *for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*.

The days of Messiah’s kingdom is referred to as a time of **abundant peace** רֵב שְׁלוֹם: “*In His days the righteous flourish, with an abundance of peace ...*” (Psalm 72:7); “*Those who love Your law have great peace,...*” (Psalm 119:165); “*But the humble will inherit the land and will delight themselves in the abundance of peace*” (Psalm 37:11). And, “*All your sons will be taught of the Lord; and abundant is the peace of your sons*” (Isaiah 54:13).

Verses 12-22 contain the difference between the wicked and the righteous.

1. The heart of the wicked is exposed by what they would like to do, yet in the end they will fail, as the Lord opposes them and laughs at them in derision (verses 12-13, see also Psalm 2:4).
2. While the believers in the Older and Newer Testament were promised persecution (2 Timothy 3:12), the evil that the wicked plan will come down upon them (verses 14-15).
3. Solomon repeats the first part, *better a little in righteousness* that would be now, in this life (Proverbs 15:16; 16:8), because throughout eternity the Lord will *sustain the righteous* (verses 16-17). [The Targum (the Aramaic translation) has “the Word of the Lord upholds the righteous,” making it a Messianic reference].
4. The Lord pays careful attention to what is happening to the righteous (Psalm 1:6), and their heritage will remain forever (verses 18-20), for we have an eternal inheritance (Hebrews 9:15) in contrast to the wicked who will vanish like smoke.
5. Finally, there is a restating of the reward to the righteous, who he counsels to behave unselfishly. They shall inherit the land, with the final contrast to the wicked; who break their promises and don’t pay back what they borrowed (verses 21-22).

Exhortations for the just 37:23-31 and reiterations that the LORD is in control (37:32-40)

God’s care and nearness are then described. The LORD establishes the steps of the righteous and delights in his way (verse 23). It is He who holds our hand even when we fall (verse 24). He will never leave us nor forsake us, providing us with the necessities of life (verse 25). He gives grace to us so that we may be a blessing to others (verse 26), and we do this by staying the course and by departing from evil and doing what is right (verse 27). He will not abandon us (verse 28), but we will dwell in the land forever (verse 29). And as the Word of the Lord

dwells in our heart so we will speak of wisdom, justice and righteousness (verses 30-31). Therefore wait upon the Lord and walk in His ways (verse 34), then the future is secured (verse 37). He is our ever-present help in times of troubles, and has become our salvation (verses 39-40); as such we take refuge in Him.

Conclusion

David teaches us in this Psalm to trust in the LORD, walk in His ways and to pursue righteousness, just as Messiah did in the beatitudes (Matthew 5-7). The Lord will bless and will reward the righteous. Some of the rewards will have to wait until He establishes His kingdom, but until then don't envy the wicked for they will perish in His righteous judgement, but trust in the LORD and seek refuge in Him.

Selah

Blessings in Messiah

Paul & Sue