

Psalm 37

Once we understand that God is in control and directing events (as Joseph did), it causes us to “commit our way” to him, as this psalm explains.

The psalm is an acrostic, in which each section begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Since the alphabet was seen as encompassing all knowledge, this psalm expresses a mystery.

As early as the 1st & 2nd centuries B.C. the Jews noted that 22 was significant in not just being the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet but also the number of generations from Adam to Jacob (Israel), the number of works of creation, and the number of books in the Jewish canon of the Bible.

Psalm 37:1 - “Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity.”

Rashi - Don't “compete with the success of the evildoers” by imitating their wicked ways.

(This entire verse is quoted almost verbatim in **Proverbs 24:19**; and there's also a reference to it in **Proverbs 23:17**.)

‘Roll thy way unto the Lord’

Psalm 37:4-5 - “Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Commit (*galal* - “roll”) thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass.”

Sometimes God chooses a strange path to get us there, though, as he did with Joseph. We don't have the ability to determine within ourselves how we should conduct our lives, nor can we explain and understand every turn of events. We must “roll” all of these uncertainties onto the Lord.

Jacob, who single handedly “rolled” (*galal*) the stone off of the well to water Rachel's sheep, is a picture of Christ doing the same for us his bride, if we agree to commit our lives, so we can partake of his water of life.

By doing this, we also accept the circumcision of the heart, our death, and roll away the reproach of Egypt. After they all passed over the Jordan River, God commanded that all Israelite males be circumcised. Once that was accomplished, he said:

Joshua 5:9 - “And the LORD said unto Joshua, This day have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off you. Wherefore the name of the place is called Gilgal unto this day.” (from *galal* - “roll”)

Josephus (Antiqu. l. 5. c. 1. sect. 11.) says Gilgal means “liberty” - probably interpreting the result rather than the literal translation of the word.

Colossians 2:11 - “In whom also we are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in the putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him”

In the same way, the angel rolled the stone away from Christ’s tomb at His resurrection (**Matthew 28:2**).

Psalm 37:7 - “Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him ...”

This is what Joseph had to do, and so do we.

Blessed are the Meek

Psalm 37:9 - “For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth.”

Psalm 37:11 - “But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.”

“the earth” is *eretz* - usually translated as “land” But the Septuagint substitutes “earth” here (although not in verse 9), and Jesus also chose that translation when he included this in the beatitudes:

Matthew 5:5 - “Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.”

This is the “new heavens and a new earth” promised in **2 Peter 3:13**.

“The meek” are “*anav*” - the humble, lowly, afflicted, poor, depressed, needy, miserable - yet also gentle, willing to bear injuries without revenge.

Used to describe Moses: **Numbers 12:3** - “Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth.”

Proverbs 16:19 - “Better it is to be of an humble spirit with the lowly (meek), than to divide the spoil with the proud.”

Compare Paul’s expression of his own meekness: “Sorrowful, yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing, yet possessing all things” (**2 Corinthians 6:10**).

Psalm 37:12 - “The wicked plotteth against the just, and gnasheth upon him with his

teeth.”

An expression of rage and hatred, seen in **Acts 7:54** in the stoning of Stephen.

Psalm 37:16 - “A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked.”

Rashi interprets this as the “few” righteous vs the “many” wicked. “Amraphel and his allies initiated a war in the world for the purpose of capturing Lot and provoking Abraham, but the few who were with Abraham succeeded and wiped out all those armies.”

‘Olam’

Psalm 37:18 - “The LORD knoweth the days of the upright: and their inheritance shall be for ever.”

Their inheritance shall be “*olam*” = This noun is derived from the verb '*alam*', meaning 'to hide', 'keep secret', or 'obscure'. Also of duration: “forever, the vanishing point.” It includes the idea of obscurity - “ignorance” of its true meaning; eternity, the future, the age or duration of the world, or of the world to come. In post-biblical Hebrew, it’s mostly in reference to the Messianic age, or the world to come; secret, mysterious.

God has “set eternity” in the hearts of men (Ecclesiastes 3:11), i.e. the awareness of a state of existence outside of time, causing a desire to know the future and find spiritual meaning, but not able to do so.

Ecclesiastes 3:11 - “God has made everything fit beautifully in its appropriate time. He has also placed *olam* in the human heart, yet people cannot discover what God has ordained, from the beginning to the end of their lives.”

In **Genesis 21:33** the statement appears, “Abraham called there (at Beersheba) on the name of Yahweh, God *olam*’.”

Psalm 37:19 - “They shall not be ashamed in the evil time: and *in the days of famine* they shall be satisfied.”

God sent Joseph to accomplish this very thing:

Genesis 45:7 - “And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance.”

Psalm 37:21-22 - “The wicked borroweth, and payeth not again: but the righteous sheweth mercy, and giveth. For such as be blessed of him shall inherit the earth; and they that be cursed of him shall be cut off.”

Rashi - The Holy One, blessed be He, Who is the Righteous One of the world, is gracious with His own and gives it to the one who lent what he [the borrower] stole from him.

(Ultimately, only Christ is the "Righteous One").

Psalm 37:23-24 - "The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth him with his hand."

Compare Paul's experience: "Perplexed, yet not unto despair, pursued yet nor forsaken, smitten down, yet not destroyed" (**2 Corinthians 4:9**)

This perfectly describes Joseph's experience, and his explanation that despite his betrayal and abuse, God had "sent" him for a purpose.

Psalm 37:27 - "Depart from evil, and do good; and dwell for evermore."

evermore = "*olam*" again. Abide in the "world to come" of Messiah.

Psalm 37:28 - "The seed of the wicked shall be cut off,"

In the original text, the letter *ayin*, which is the last letter of both wicked and seed, is literally cut off, and is not expressed.

Psalm 37:35-36 - "I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree. Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not: yea, I sought him, but he could not be found."

And in contrast:

Psalm 37:37 - "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace."

Noah, Job and Jacob were all called perfect - "*tam*" or upright, undefiled, complete, sound, whole, pure, innocent.

The Greek Septuagint uses the word *amemptos*, meaning "blameless," for Job and the word *haplous*, meaning "simple," or "plain" for Jacob. But they're all "*tam*" in the Hebrew.

Since the Bible also tells us, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (**Romans 3:23**) those who are reckoned as "upright" have put on the righteousness of Christ by faith and are reflecting *His* perfection.

One possible interpretation:

This contrast between the “wicked one” who no longer can be found, but replaced by the “upright” who we behold, might be seen as reflecting the process of repentance and death to self, in which we reckon ourselves dead, and “mark” or see only the new man, the “upright,” which is our new identity in Christ.

“I sought him, but he could not be found” - Rabbi Nachman of Breslov (1772-1810) sees this as meaning the effects of repentance: “you shall reflect upon his place and he will not be there, for in his place stands a *baal tshuvah* – a master of repentance” i.e., one who has returned to God. “One must make oneself into nothing, like a wasteland over which people trample: one must pay no attention whatsoever to opposition or abuse from others.”

(Rabbi Nachman then asks his students to look at others in the same way, in effect as in Philippians 4:8).

Breathe out self, breathe in the Spirit

If you want to return to God you must make yourself into a new creation. You can do this with a sigh! "Sighing breaks a person's whole body" (Talmud Berachot 58b) and therefore the body is remade: “Sigh, therefore, you son of man; with the breaking of your loins. And it shall be, when they say unto you: Why are you sighing? That you shall say: Because of the tidings, for it comes; and every heart shall melt, and all hands shall be slack, and every spirit shall be faint, and all knees shall drip with water” (Ezekiel 21:11-12).

“When a person wants to repent ... the way to do this is with a sigh. This is similar to what happens just before a person dies: he draws in extra air and then the spirit leaves him. Every exhalation is the death of the moment that has passed, in preparation for the birth of the new moment.”

- Rabbi Nachman

The final verse sums up everything:

Psalm 37:39-40 (Jewish version)- “But the salvation of the righteous is from the Lord, their stronghold in time of distress. The Lord helped them and rescued them; He rescued them from the wicked and saved them because they took refuge in Him.”

Because Hebrew is always a little obscure about its verb tenses, this could be past, present or future. The NET version has it in present tense. The King James version puts this in the future as a promise:

“And the LORD shall help them, and deliver them: he shall deliver them from the wicked, and save them, because they trust in him.”

