

When Bad People Prosper

Psalm 37:1-11

- ❑ As we observe our world today, it is obvious that many “bad” people¹ are getting rich, gaining power, and abusing power, often at the expense of the “good” and humble people.

📖 “In his arrogance the wicked man hunts down the weak,
 who are caught in the schemes he devises.
 He boasts of the cravings (desires) of his heart;
 he blesses the greedy and reviles (renounces) the LORD.
 In his pride the wicked does not seek him;
 in all his thoughts there is no room for God.
 His ways are always prosperous;
 [God’s] laws are rejected by him; he sneers at all his enemies” (*Psalm 10:2-5, NIV*)²



1. When you see a bad person (or bad people) gain success, riches or power, how do you feel? If you are a believer attempting to do the right things, but see bad people gaining advantage over you and/or other believers, how do you feel?

What Not to Do

- ❑ Read Psalm 37:1-11.³ Three times, David says, “Do not fret,”⁴ (37:1, 7, 8). He also says, “[Do not] be envious” (37:1); and “Refrain from anger and turn from wrath” (37:8).



2. Sometimes good people get disturbed and angry when they see bad people prospering (having success). What (or whom) are they angry at?⁵

Why Not to Do It

3. Why should good people *not* fret because of bad people, or envy those who do wrong? Why should good people turn away from anger and rage?⁶ (37:2, 8-10)

¹ In this lesson, ‘bad people’ generally refers to those to who are prideful and immoral, rejecting God’s laws. ‘Good people’ generally refers to those who humbly attempt to do good, desiring to live according to God’s laws. The ‘good people’ in this psalm have a relationship with God (they are God’s people). Actually, no one is truly ‘good’ (relative to God) but those who belong to God through faith are declared righteous by God’s grace (Romans 3:9-26).

² Like Psalm 37, Psalm 10 deals with the supposed ‘success’ of bad people (see Psalm 10:2-11; and also 73:4-12).

³ Psalm 37 is an alphabetic acrostic poem. Each letter of the Hebrew alphabet (22 characters) appears once and in traditional order, with each letter introducing a unit of four lines (except in verses 14-15 and 25-26).

⁴ ‘fret’ (*hārâ*) – burn, be kindled (of anger). Literally, ‘Do not kindle yourself.’ (Also used in Proverbs 24:19.) The English word ‘fret’ means to be annoyed, worried, disturbed or irritated.

⁵ They may be angry at the bad person, other people, the situation in general, or God (for allowing it to happen).

⁶ Evil men may be ‘successful’ now, but it will not last. Though vibrant and green in the springtime, the grass turns brown and withers away in the hot, dry summer. So it is with evil men, eventually. See Psalm 49, 103:15-16; Isaiah 40:6-8; James 1:10-11; 4:14. Actually, the transitory nature of life applies to *all* people – both bad and good. Thus we need to invest in eternity. We need to store up treasures in heaven rather than on earth (see Matthew 6:19-21). Anger, rage and fret leads only to evil (Psalm 37:8). ‘...for man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires’ (James 1:20). This does not mean that anger is always wrong. A ‘righteous anger’ can motivate good people to stand up for righteousness and promote justice. However, man’s anger is usually negative (see Jay’s ‘What about Anger?’) As Paul wrote, ‘Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good’ (Romans 12:21).

- 📖 “People who have wealth but lack understanding are like the beasts that perish” (*Psalms 49:20, NIV*)
- 📖 “Better the little that the righteous have than the wealth of many wicked” (*Psalms 37:16, NIV*)



What to Do

- ❑ Instead of fretting because of bad people, what should we do?
 - “Trust in the LORD and do good” (v. 3).⁷
 - “Delight yourself (take delight) in the LORD” (v. 4).
 - “Commit your way to the LORD” (v. 5).⁸
 - “Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him” (v. 7).
- ❑ Each of these actions involves “the LORD.” God is “the LORD” to people who have a relationship with Him through faith. Trust (in Jesus Christ) is the fundamental thing to do.
 4. How can we “delight ourselves in the LORD?” What does this mean?



Why to Do It

5. As believers, why should we attempt to live righteous lives when it seems the bad people are getting along fine in this world? (It may even seem their ways work better!)
- ❑ We should trust in the LORD, do good, delight in Him, and commit our lives to Him because He is God – the Designer, Creator, and Ruler of the universe. Our purpose is to serve Him. This is the essence of life. When we respond to God in the right way...
 - We will enjoy the LORD’s blessing, provision and protection (v. 3).⁹
 - The LORD will give us the desires of our heart (v. 4).¹⁰
 - The LORD will make it known that our behavior is righteous and our cause is just (v. 6).
 - We will “inherit the land” and enjoy great peace (v. 9, 11).
 - 📖 Jesus said, “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth” (*Matthew 5:5*).¹¹

Reflection/Application

- Is your way of life more like the “good people” or the “bad people?” (*Consider footnote 1*) Do you need to trust in the Lord? As a believer, are you truly delighting in the Lord? Read & reflect on psalms like Psalm 27. Constantly pray to the Lord, seeking to grow closer to Him.

⁷ This instruction is followed up with ‘dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture.’ In the Old Testament context, the ‘land’ is the ‘promised land’ – God’s provision for the life of his people. Dwelling in the land involves faithfulness to God. To ‘enjoy safe pasture’ is to experience God’s blessings, provision and protection

⁸ To commit one’s way to the LORD is to commit everything to Him. This includes our lives, families, ambitions, careers, possessions, and reputations. We need to commit everything to God’s purposes, control and guidance. We need to seek *God’s* way, not *our* way or the *world’s* way.

⁹ This does not mean that the Christian believer will always be kept safe from physical harm, but our relationship with God and our inheritance in heaven are secured by God’s power (see Romans 8:28-39; 1 Peter 1:3-5).

¹⁰ If we truly ‘delight ourselves in the LORD’ our desires will be aligned with His will.

¹¹ ‘meek’ – a humble and gentle attitude toward others based on a true estimate of ourselves. We do not inherit the earth by our own strength and aggressiveness. We ‘inherit the earth’ through a humble relationship with God. Jesus’ words allude to Psalm 37:11, which speak of the ‘promised land.’ However, the promised land of the Old Testament points to the ultimate ‘promised land’ – the new heavens and the new earth – i.e., the consummation of the kingdom of heaven (Isaiah 65:17; Revelation 21:1). This is the ultimate inheritance and place of righteousness and peace.