

The Calming of the Anxious Saint

Psalm 37

A. Introduction.

1. As the author of this psalm, David is not a recluse, but rather a person who regularly has exposure to the raw world around him, especially on account of kingly privilege. As a child of God, he is like “righteous Lot, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men” (II Pet. 2:7). However, time has led him to filter this scenario through the wide-angle lens of history, the broad sweep and course of men’s lives, as interpreted according to a “LORD-centered” world-view. Whereas “Adonai” and “Elohim” are mentioned once, “LORD/Jehovah/Yahweh” is mentioned fourteen times.
2. Consequently David desires to pass on the fruit of his observations to other children of God who presently have not found resolution for their anxiety. Now being old, v. 25, he has an accumulation of wisdom to pass on. Present injustice and flourishing wickedness disturb younger believers so that perhaps they seek David’s counsel. Nevertheless he himself is not free from all unease in this regard, the reason being his distress at the consternation of other less mature believers. Perhaps this concern is evident in the lack of development in this composition which makes divisions hard to discern as themes recur in a disorderly fashion.
3. Whereas in David’s day, scandalous, shocking, tragic, news was less accessible, especially in the political, military, judicial, and international arenas, today the world stage is constantly before our eyes; electronic media enable the visibility of world conflict, sophisticated corruption and intrigue with panoramic, wide-screen proportions. The result is a far greater capacity for soul distress on the part of Christians since wickedness appears to be of such overwhelming proportions. This being so, the antidote is a yet clearer vision concerning the divine perspective of history.
4. Perspective of a situation can make a world of difference. For instance, to look outside at the world passing by through the doors of the foyer of a large building is to gain a frame by frame viewpoint. But how much more comprehensive is that vision of the same street scene from the top floor of that forty-story building. So world history, and even its local representation, is best understood, not according to frame by frame tabloid snapshots, but rather the wide-angle lens of centuries of honest human biography, and especially the interpretive commentary of the Word of God. Psalm 37 provides such a vantage point.

A. The present anxiety of the saint confronted, vs. 1-11.

While a parent will protect its children from early exposure to the unvarnished world, the time comes when those same children must leave the nest and walk the streets where there are sordid and sleazy promotions to the right and to the left. Consequently a godly fatherly interest leads to necessary instruction that realistically interprets the snares and solicitations that abound by stripping away the façade of deceitful, delusive propositions. David knows

from experience of the shock that the present world, all of its paraded wickedness, presents to the virtuous, godly believer, and of the inevitable question as to why God continues to tolerate such evil. Hence, he provides a rationale for patient perseverance, endurance in righteousness, after the manner of the proverb of Charles Kingsley, “Be good, sweet maid, and let who will be clever.”

1. A negative exhortation concerning evildoers, vs. 1-2.

To begin with, the young believer needs to appreciate the blessing that will come to him when he gives heed to the pilgrimage of the older believer. In particular he needs to enquire about wounds and scars as well as learn of road conditions, hucksters, assailants, also the seductive allurements of a Mr. Worldly-Wiseman and a Mr. By-ends as portrayed in *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Earlier in his life, David had been perplexed by the prosperity of scoundrels, but his subsequent observations and musings have led him to give thanks to God that the prayerful cry of these secret adolescent lusts was never fulfilled. After all, if we are covetous of the affluence and success and applause of the wicked, we should realize that we cannot be selective. If we yearn for the wealth of the wicked, then we may end up with the full package, that is the wealth of their estate that goes hand-in-hand with the poverty of their soul. If we want their prosperity, we must also include with it the unholy methodology by which we would similarly acquire their affluent lifestyle.

a. Their unenviable condition, v. 1.

The child of God has confessed to David concerning his observance of many of his neighbors and work associates. “There are no pains in their death, and their body is fat. They are not in trouble as other men, not are they plagued like mankind. Therefore pride is their necklace; the garment of violence covers them. Their eye bulges from fatness; the imaginations of their heart run riot. . . . Behold these are the wicked; and always at ease, they have increased in wealth” (Ps. 73:4-7, 12).

(1) Don't be agitated about evildoers.

“Do not fret/burn/be indignant [חָרָה, *charah*, cf. vs. 7-8; Prov. 24:19-20] because of evildoers.” The parallelism with the second line suggests a consuming, obsessive longing with regard to the apparent success of the wicked. Their plotting and scheming has paid off; they have risen above those who have played the game fairly; they even boastfully commend their *modus operandi*, and thus surprisingly attract even the interest of the child of God. However Spurgeon makes explanation here concerning the anomaly of such an attitude of covetousness coming from a Christian.

Nature is very apt to kindle a fire of jealousy when it sees lawbreakers riding on horses, and obedient subjects walking in the mire: it is a lesson learned only in the school of grace, when one comes to view the most paradoxical providences with the devout complacency of one who is sure that the Lord is righteous in all his acts. It seems hard to carnal judgments that the best meat should go to the dogs, while loving children pine for want of it.¹

¹ C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, II, p. 188.

Unlike the child of this world who makes mammon his god, the child of God ought to be “content in whatever circumstances” he finds himself, with “humble means” or “in prosperity,” whether “having abundance” or “suffering need” (Phil. 4:11-12). Indeed, “better is the little of the righteous than the abundance of many wicked,” v. 16. Probably David’s addressees are spending too much time listening to the overtures of Madison Avenue, and thus they cultivate unprofitable appetites while starving their souls.

(2) Don’t be acquisitive concerning evildoers.

“Be not envious/jealous [נִיזַן, *qanah*, cf. 73:3; Prov. 23:17; 24:1, 19] toward wrongdoers.” When the believer has good spiritual health, although tempted, he will shun the ambitions, baubles, and provocations of Vanity Fair even though he must pass through this gaudy wilderness. He knows that this doomed territory is but an outpost of the City of Destruction. Thus Spurgeon again explains:

When one is poor, despised, and in deep trial, our old Adam naturally becomes envious of the rich and great; and when we are conscious that we have been more righteous than they, the devil is sure to be at hand with blasphemous reasonings. Stormy weather may curdle even the cream of humanity. Evil men, instead of being envied, are to be viewed with horror and aversion; yet their loaded tables, and gilded trappings, are too apt to fascinate our poor half-opened eyes. Who envies the fat bullock the ribbons and garlands which decorate him as he is led to the shambles? Yet the case is a parallel one; for ungodly rich men are but as beasts fattened for the slaughter.²

When as Christians we are envious of the opulence of the world, we may be likened either to Lot’s wife who looked back toward Sodom and Gomorrah with regret at her departure, and became a pillar of salt, or Lot who, having fled, perhaps did not want to distance himself from big city life and so asked for residence in Zoar, it also being less than safe (Gen. 19:19-23, 26, 30).

b. Their unavoidable destiny, v. 2.

The man of this world is wholly governed by his temporal, physical condition in the present and his advancement during the course of his earthly life. Without any concern for his relationship with the God who made him, he lives for a material, sensual, enjoyable, pleasurable, self-satisfying mode of existence that centers around himself. Yet there is an unavoidable frustration, a futility in this pursuit, even as Solomon learned. “Thus I hated all the fruit of my labor for which I had labored under the sun, for I must leave it to the man who will come after me. . . . As he came naked from his mother’s womb, so will he return as he came. He will take nothing from the fruit of his labor that he can carry in his hand. This is also a grievous evil—exactly as a man is born, thus will he die. So what is the advantage to him who toils for the wind? . . . All a man’s labor is for his mouth and yet the appetite is not satisfied. . . . I have seen everything during my lifetime of futility; there is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness and there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his wickedness” (Eccles. 2:18; 5:15-16; 6:7; 7:15). So

² Ibid.

David has experienced the same futility, except that his resolution of the problem is similar to that of Solomon who eventually concludes: “Although a sinner does evil a hundred times and may lengthen his life, still I know that it will be well with those who fear God, who fear Him openly. . . . The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil” (Eccles. 8:12; 11:13-14).

(1) Their strength will fail.

“For they will wither quickly like the grass.” It needs to be understood that, contrary to a strictly materialistic view of life, David not only considers the unavoidable trauma of the end of this life, and that of this age as well, but also the inevitable appointment of accountability before God, a day of moral judgment and settlement in the affairs of man that the conclusion of his life will lead to, vs. 9-13, 18, 22, 28-29, 32-33, 37-38. As life progresses, after a brief time of vigor and bloom, there is inescapable, creeping humiliation as the zeal of youth gives way to the downward spiral of aging (Eccles. 12:1-8). So the greatest achievers in this world, those who have striven ruthlessly, ambitiously and attained great wealth, recognition, and status, nevertheless cannot stem the tide of degeneration, the weakening of faculties. Even fame diminishes as others, more youthful, take the limelight, for a fleeting season. However, the point is that while *all* of Adam’s race partake of this same rise and fall, those who so foolishly build solely upon brief earthly achievement, with themselves being the center of their universe, the end is bleak, hopeless, despairing, and bitter.

(2) Their appearance will deteriorate.

“And fade like a green herb.” Similarly, “Man, who is born of woman, is short-lived and full of turmoil. Like a flower he comes forth and withers. He also flees like a shadow and does not remain” (Job 14:1-2). There is something pathetic about a person who, like a fading Hollywood movie star who relies more and more on cosmetic enhancement, attempts to live as “mutton dressed up as lamb”! Again, consider the formerly robust, broad-shouldered athlete who now appears so feeble, portly, wrinkled! Or consider the previously honored, ram-rod straight general who now, with head drooping forward, is moved about in a wheelchair. But then, we all go this route, except that for the self-made godless and proud this course is particularly galling. Often a crisis comes as a wake-up call in this regard, such as with illness, in which a sudden awareness comes concerning our mortality. The hymn writer Henry Francis Lyte expressed this concern when, confronted with death, he wrote:

Swift to its close ebbs out life’s little day;
Earth’s joys grow dim, its glories pass away;
Change and decay in all around I see:
O Thou who changest not abide with me.

So Scripture frequently puts forward the inevitability of this human dilemma, this predicament of human existence, except that, as with the preceding hymn verse, it presents the only solution, and that is faith by the finite in the Infinite, the temporal in the Eternal, the fleeting in the Immutable, the decadent in the Imperishable (Ps. 103:15; Isa. 40:6-8; 51:12; Jas. 1:10-11; I Pet. 1:23-25), that is the Son of God, Jesus Christ (John 5:25; 6:39-40, 51; 8:51; 11:25-26; 12:23-26), even as vs. 3-6 now explain.

2. A positive exhortation concerning faithfulness, vs. 3-6.

Here is David's fatherly call to renewed consecration by the pilgrim child of God rather than conversion. Thus, "strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed" (Heb. 12:12-13). Overall, the exhortation is for course correction due to deviation from "the hope, . . . the race that is set before us" (Heb. 6:18; 12:1). In other words, "having girded your loins with truth" (Eph. 6:14), consequently "prepare your minds for action" (I Pet. 1:13). Hence an adjustment of focus is necessary, that being concentration upon "the LORD," the sole living God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, rather than the puny, fleeting accomplishments of man.

a. Trust in the LORD, v. 3.

This "LORD" here is exclusively Jehovah, the great "I AM" God, which name was revealed to Israel alone, about to be redeemed through the agency of Moses. Hence God declared to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is My name forever, this is my memorial-name to all generations" (Exod. 3:15). As the obedience of faith was at the heart of this redemption, so the life of the redeemed is to continue with the obedience of faith in "the LORD," that is "for/unto good works" (Eph. 2:10), as now exhorted.

(1) The LORD of covenant blessing and expectation.

"Trust in the LORD and do good." The fretful disposition previously described in v. 1 implies a carnal dissatisfaction with and lack of faith in the providence of God. Therefore there is consideration of self-intervention, even capitulation to the world, so that the embarrassing injustice of the present situation might be remedied. However, the child of God is here encouraged to turn his gaze away from thoughts of succumbing to this world, from evildoers, the tabloid and televised dramatization of their sordid exploits, toward the Lord, specifically His covenant faithfulness, trustworthiness, personal interestedness, vindication of righteousness. "Trust," בָּטַח, *batach*, here has the thought of prostration on the ground, total yielding, hence repose, the belief that completely rests in the LORD's covenant faithfulness (Ps. 32:10; 40:4; 55:23).

Furthermore, according to the right order of faith that is productive of godly works (Tit. 2:14), so here renewed focus on the Lord is to be accompanied with works that are suitable for a redeemed child of God, that is "good," beneficial/advancing spiritual, moral prosperity, טוֹב, *tob* (cf. v. 27; 73:28). In

other words, contrary to the temptation to actively invest in this world's sordid economy, rather employ the "wealth of unrighteousness" in ventures that have spiritual fruit as their goal (Luke 16:9). Thus, "whatever . . . is of good repute, dwell on these things" (Phil. 4:8). Of course, if we earnestly, devotedly focus on this LORD, then as "Light in the Lord, [we will] walk as children of Light (for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth)" (Eph. 5:8-9).

(2) The blessing and expectation of the covenant LORD.

"Dwell in the land [אֶרֶץ, *eretz*, cf. vs. 9, 11, 22, 29, 34] and cultivate faithfulness." The parallelism here suggests that "trust" is expounded with the thought of restful, productive inhabitation of the land that was originally promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Hence dwelling in the land is an act of faith, a literal resting and residing in the territorial provision of God for His people (Gen. 11:31; 12:1, 7; 15:7, 18; Acts 7:2-3). In other words, the hope of Israel was not to be in fretfully looking back at the prosperity of the world, represented by the "fish . . . [and] the cucumbers and the melons and the leeks and the onions and the garlic" of Egypt, while at the same time complaining of the Lord's food of "manna" in the wilderness (Num. 11:5-6). Rather there was to be anticipation of "a good and spacious land, . . . a land flowing with milk and honey, . . . [that] which He swore to your fathers" (Exod. 3:8; 13:5). This involved an oath that Israel was to continually trust in (Jer. 11:5).

However residence in the land was not to be a passive occupation, as if all of the blessings there simply dripped down from heaven, with the inhabitants reclining, into their gaping mouths! Rather the milk and the honey had to be planted, cultivated, harvested, packaged, and distributed. Thus redemption resulted not only in rich resources, but also a variety of responsibilities, all of which could be classified as "doing good," v. 2. So here, David illustrates practical Christian virtue in terms of "cultivating faithfulness." This also involves employing the rich resources of the means of grace, whereby we plant the Word, cultivate the Word, reap from the Word, mediate the Word, and proclaim the Word; this indeed is "doing good" and "cultivating righteousness."

While in no way diminishing the ongoing validity of "the land" for Israel in both present and future territorial terms, by way of *application* this geographic residence for God's people, the intended holiness of its economy, well describes the holy aura that ought to pervade the church of Jesus Christ in both its local, universal, and consummate forms. Thus the church is not the place for "evildoers," but rather those who live by faith, v. 9; the citizens of the church are to be humble, eagerly investing in spiritual prosperity, v. 11; the church comprises those blessed by the LORD, while apostates and the surrounding world are under His curse, v. 22; the righteous are the true members of the church, and as such they have eternal tenancy, v. 29; the faithful in the church who are patient will inherit the consummation of the body of Christ, v. 34.

b. Delight in the LORD, v. 4.

“Exquisitely delight/enjoy [עָנַג, anog, cf. Isa. 55:2] yourself in the LORD; and He will give you the desires of your heart.” Here is a synonym for “trust,” v. 3, which indicates that faith is, to a considerable degree, strengthened according to our true comprehension of this LORD. In other words, faith is an embrace of truth, and when we behold the truth of the glory and grace of this LORD, our response is not casual, but “exquisite delight” (cf. Ps. 1:2; 40:8; 73:25). Hence the contrast between vs. 1-2 and vs. 3-4 concerns the direction of our soul’s gaze. The former view is excessively occupied with the allurements and economy of this world; the later view gives priority to “the kingdom of God and His righteousness” (Matt. 6:3). Supremely David commends the zooming in of faith on the LORD Himself for His own sake, that is the appeal of His perfections. Such enjoyment concerns both revealed and experienced truth, the result being a profound effect upon and cultivation of my affections. Consequently I more and more think God’s thoughts and desire His desires. Further the result is that I make known to Him my newly aroused desires that turn out to be the fruit of His tending care. Thus “the desires of my heart” turn out to be the desires of His heart! Thus God produces children in His likeness (I Sam. 13:13-14).

John Bunyan wrote a work titled *The Desire of the Righteous Granted*, based upon, “The fear of the wicked, it shall come upon him; but the desire of the righteous shall be granted” (Prov. 10:24, and, “The desire of the righteous is only good” (Prov. 11:23). Of the desires that may be enjoyed in this life, he gives priority to longing for communion with God and declares:

God’s presence is renewing, transforming, seasoning, sanctifying, commanding, sweetening, and enlightening to the soul! [There is] nothing like it in all the world; his presence supplies all wants, heals all maladies, saves from all dangers; [his presence] is life in death, heaven in hell; all in all. No marvel, then, if the presence of, and communion with, God, is become the desire of the righteous man.³

For Bunyan it naturally follows that a man who longs for intimate acquaintance with the presence of God should also desire God’s appointed ordinances by which His presence is mediated, especially His designated place for worship. In the Old Testament economy this place was in the holy of holies, between the cherubim, above the mercy seat. In the New Testament economy this place is the incarnate temple of Jesus Christ, wherever He is present and worshipped (John 1:14; 2:19; Rev. 21:22).

Alas! The righteous are as it were undone, if God’s ordinances be taken from them: “How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts. My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord, my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God” (Ps. 84:1-2). Behold what a taking the good man was in, because at this time he could not attain to so frequent a being in the temple of God as his soul desired. It even longed and fainted, yea, and his heart and his flesh cried out for the God that dwelt in the temple at Jerusalem. Yes, he seems in the next words to envy the very birds that could more commonly frequent the temple than he: “The sparrow,” saith he, “hath found a house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thy altars, O Lord of hosts, my King, and my God” (Ps. 84:3). And then

³ John Bunyan, *Works*, I, p. 756.

blesseth all them that had the liberty of temple worship, saying, ‘Blessed are they that dwell in thy house, they will be still praising thee’ (Ps. 84:4).⁴

c. Commit to the LORD, vs. 5-6.

“Commit/unroll your way/journey/path [דֶּרֶךְ, *derek*, vs. 7, 23, 34] upon the [shoulder of the] LORD [Ps. 22:8], trust also in Him.” But what is this “way”? It is the course of life that a man follows, or even the direction that God takes, especially its moral quality (Ps. 18:30), usually determined either by man in wickedness (Ps. 1:6a; 107:17; 119:29, 101; 146:9) or the LORD in righteousness (Ps. 1:6b; 5:8; 27:11; 77:13; 119:1). Thus life is a pilgrimage, so that in John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, Christian instructs Pliable: “I am directed by a man whose name is Evangelist, to speed me to a little gate that is before us, where we shall receive instructions about the way.”⁵

(1) He will heed the cry of faith, v. 5.

“And He will do it,” that is secure the path of the child of God, fence it in, clear it of offences, keep it straight. William Plumer explains:

The error against which we are here warned is reliance on our own strength or wisdom. The encouragement here given to renounce all self-confidence and to look to God alone, is that He will graciously undertake our case, bear our burdens, and accomplish for us that which we could never bring to pass.⁶

Thus “trust,” v. 3, “delight,” v. 4, and “unburdening,” v. 5, with regard to the Lord, all of which terms are incorporated in “faith,” result in the accomplishment of God’s vocation for His child (Heb. 11:4-38), no matter how difficult the way may prove to be. Of course this faith is essentially a committal to the will of God rather than the will of man. Bonar explains:

Thy way, not mine, O Lord,
 However dark it be!
 Lead me by Thine own hand,
 Choose the path for me.
 Smooth let it be, or rough,
 It will be still the best;
 Winding, or straight, it leads
 Right onward to Thy rest.
 I dare not choose my lot;
 I would not if I might;
 Choose Thou for me, my God,
 So shall I walk aright.

⁴ Ibid., p. 757.

⁵ Ibid., III, p. 91.

⁶ William S. Plumer, *Psalms*, p. 150.

The kingdom that I seek
Is Thine, so let the way
That leads to it be Thine
Else I must surely stray.

(2) He will sanctify the cry of faith, v. 6.

“He will bring forth your righteousness as the light [dawning that displaces early morning darkness] and your judgment [vindication] as the [greatest brightness of] noonday.” Here God’s ultimate purpose concerning this way/journey/pilgrimage is expounded; it is that, by means of the Divine Horticulturalist, the bud might bloom, the ear of grain might ripen, the child of God might become a man of God, and that in a field where weeds and tares also grow (Isa. 58:8, 10; Eph. 4:13; Phil. 1:9; II Pet. 3:18). Specifically, He promotes His essential “righteousness/moral integrity and loyalty” [צֶדֶק, *tsedeq*] in relation to man (Ps. 7:8), along with “justice” [מִשְׁפָּט, *mishpat*], that is His administered holy will and ways (Eccles. 12:14). Here, all of this is especially for the justification of His children, their vindication in their holy shining forth in the midst of the unholy darkness of this world (Dan. 12:2-3; Matt. 5:14-16; 13:43; I Pet. 2:12).

Thus the goodness of God in providing “the desires of your heart,” v. 4, is for the purpose of our moral enhancement, not simply our comfort in times of distressing circumstances that the world throws at us. Hence although godly men may suffer mistreatment and injustice, yet, like Joseph, their day of vindication and shining forth is inevitable because of God’s overshadowing providence.

See holy David, [yet] Saul with all his kingly might could not destroy him. God brought David forth at last as a shining light, as the sun at noon-day; and what a bright light was David over the whole land! How thick a darkness fell upon our Lord Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, in his holy sufferings and death; but in his glorious resurrection and ascension to heaven, and proclamation of the blessed gospel, the true light burst forth, and illuminated the whole earth, so that even the heathen walk in this light, and in the brightness which has proceeded from him.⁷

So William Cowper has written:

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy and shall break
In blessings on your head.
Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.

⁷ E. W. Hengstenberg, *Works*, VI, pp. 30-31.

His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower.

3. A recapitulation concerning fretting and faith, vs. 7-11.

The truth of vs. 1-6 is restated, except that contrasting elements are further enhanced concerning the fretting of faithlessness, that results in inevitable judgment, and the rest of faith, that results in inevitable blessedness.

a. Faith rests in the LORD, v. 7a.

“Rest/be still/be silent [דָּמָם, damam] in the LORD and wait patiently/longingly/eagerly [חָלַל, chul] for Him.” Faith here is uncomplaining so that it waits silently, contentedly (Ps. 38:13-15), especially in an environment of worldly, acquisitive prosperity, as it were in the heart of Vanity Fair! Here it is the silence of the child of God that is virtuous, not noisy, clamoring discontent. Such was the temperament of Patience in comparison with Passion as revealed by the Interpreter in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*.

Passion seemed to be much discontented; but Patience was very quiet. . . . Patience is willing to wait. . . . These two lads are figures: Passion, of the men of this world; and Patience, of the world of that which is to come; for, as here thou seest, Passion will have all now this year, that is to say, in this world; so are the men of this world: they must have all their good things now, they cannot stay till next year, that is, until the next world, for their portion of good.⁸

Thus the child of God is not hasty and impetuous. Of course such a patient resignation of faith is not simply switched on, as it were, by simply an act of the will. Rather such faith presupposes a clarified, enlarged vision of this sovereign LORD, and this comprehension comes gradually. Thus “in quietness and trust is your strength” (Isa. 30:15; cf. 32:17). There are good reasons to “cease striving and know that I am God,” namely that “He makes wars to cease to the end of the earth; He breaks the bow and cuts the spear in two; He burns the chariots with fire (Ps. 46:10, 9).

b. Faith excludes worry over worldly prosperity, v. 7b-10.

Anxiety in a Christian is like walking with a perpetual cloud over our heads while surrounded with God’s providence of sunshine. Anxiety confesses belief in the goodness of God in general that yet is assured of badness for the individual who makes such a confession. Anxiety is continual pessimism, faith in the half empty glass. Anxiety slanders the character of God by charging Him with constant neglect, by belittling His paternal interest for His children. Anxiety may have physical or spiritual causes; the former based upon physical malnutrition, a disorder, illness, or trauma, calls for medical attention; the latter based upon spiritual malnutrition, lethargy, carnality, deviance, calls for a suitable prescription of spiritual nourishment and exercise.

⁸ Bunyan, *Works*, III, p. 99.

- (1) The worry that is carnal is wicked, v. 7b.

“Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, because of the man who carries out wicked schemes.” Clearly the parallelism here indicates that the “prosperity” of line two has been obtained by means of the “wicked schemes” of line three. Hence, to fret/burn/be indignant [חָרַחֵץ, *charah*, cf. vs. 1, 8] in this circumstance is to be envious of the affluence and success of those who have reached these heights by means of fraudulent, unscrupulous, deceitful practices. This lifestyle or vocation, is a “way” that sharply contrasts with the “way” of the child of God, v. 5. The inference is that we live in a world where we cannot avoid the influence of these slick entrepreneurs. The real test concerns how we respond to their schemes. But why do believers nevertheless *yield* to thinking in this way?

- (a) Because they forget that there is a day of accountability; by means of self-preoccupation, their minds are blinded to accountability before a holy God (I John 2:11).
- (b) Because they tend to think in terms of the present and ignore future consequences that may be inherent in indulgent gain. The godless seem so happy and healthy, yet there are wages to be collected (Rom. 6:23).
- (c) Because they tend to focus solely on the ends of coveted worldly gain, that may not, in themselves, be intrinsically wrong, and yet ignore the evil means by which these ends were obtained.
- (d) Because they question the providence of God and complain that His provision is unjust, especially from a personal point of view; their material comfort-zone is not satisfactory when compared with others

- (2) The worry that conflicts is evil, v. 8.

“Cease from anger/nostril snorting [חָרָה, *aph*, human here, but also divine, Exod. 32:11] and forsake wrath/hot rage [חֵמָה, *chemah*, human here, but also divine, Ps. 79:5]; do not fret; it leads only to evil-doing.” Here the outward, emotional expression of anxiety born of prolonged covetousness is described. A process is suggested, after the manner of James 1:14-15, that is the suggestion of irritation that is followed by a slow boil that results in hot displeasure and inevitable investment in business enterprise that is evil. Thus, step back, take a look at yourself and immediately put a stop to this madness; snap to it, wake up to the spreading cancerous effect on the soul of envy and covetousness

- (3) The worry that covets is shortsighted, v. 9a.

“For evildoers will be cut off.” This is the language of judgment, of future divine retribution, that is ultimately the fruit of fretting, vs. 28, 38, and also leads to elimination from the annals of history, vs. 10, 35-36, cf. Psalm 34:16. It is the failing of the shortsighted carnal child of God that, although

confessing to have a future hope in Jesus Christ's future consummate kingdom, yet his main preoccupation is with this present world. However, the spiritual child of God, although having a present stake in this present world, is mainly preoccupied with entrance into Jesus Christ's consummate kingdom, and his present qualification of faithfulness.

- (4) The worry that is conquered brings blessing, v. 9b.

“But those who wait for the LORD, they will inherit the land.” However do not David and his counselees presently inhabit the land? There may be allusion here to Israel's past history in which the faithful remnant of Caleb and Joshua alone was appointed to inhabit the land flowing with milk and honey (Exod. 3:8; Num. 14:26-25). Sadly, it was the fretting of Israel for the prosperity of Egypt, “the cucumbers and the melons and the leeks and the onions and the garlic,” that led to this eventuality (Num. 11:1-6). The same principle is described in Hebrews 4:2 where, “we who have believed enter that rest,” while concerning the unbelief of others, “I swore in My wrath, they shall not enter My rest” (Heb. 4:3; cf. Ps. 95:10-11). Consequently, “there remains a Sabbath rest [σαββατισμός, sabbatismos] for the people of God” who “rest from their [faithless] works” (Heb. 4:9). Of course David may have also anticipated the consummate kingdom of Messiah who shall eventually reign from Jerusalem over the land of Israel (Isa. 57:13; 60:21; Ezek. 36:22-24; 37:21-22, 25).

- (5) The worry that turns to divine prospects is dissolved, v. 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.” Here David's philosophy of life shines through. When young, a year seems to be an eternity; but when in our senior years, v. 25, a whole lifetime is but a fleeting moment. So the wicked have invested many years in their nefarious exploits and investments, that have also included confrontations with the law. However, for all of the excitement of their boasted material glory, nevertheless they probably have only ten or twenty more years to live at the most. But then, what if they become seriously ill tomorrow? So the best years of these degenerate lives fly away as vanity and then all that remains is a tombstone inscription, and an appointment to stand before a holy God when, “what you have whispered in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the housetops” (Luke 12:3). On earth, having sung, “I did it my way,” this wicked man's palatial mansion, his sumptuous limousine, his designer clothing, his boardroom chair of authority, his box at the opera and stadium, are all empty! Others are now appointed to take his place, the result being that it is their renown and importance that gains prominence; the other man fades into obscurity.

- c. Faith inherits the land, v. 11.

In simple terms, by way of stark contrast with “the wicked man,” v. 10, the faithful, humble child of God has a blessed, spiritually affluent future. He will inherit a place that God has prepared for him (John 14:1-3), even though the present “way” passes through “the howling waste of a wilderness” to sucking

“honey from the rock, and oil from flinty rock” (Deut. 32:10, 13-14). Like Paul, having “fought the good fight” and “finished the course, . . . in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day” (II Tim. 4:7-8).

(1) It is humble faith.

“But the humble will inherit the land.” Yet a further aspect of faith is that of acceptance of present personal injustice from the world around us rather than capitulation to its standards. Thus the “humble,” עָנָו, *anav*, are the poor, afflicted, meek (10:17; 22:26; 24:9; 34:2; 147:6; 149:4; cf. Matt. 5:3-5), who eventually shall be exalted. Thus, “things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him” (I Cor. 2:9). They will be like the humble shepherd boys Joseph and David who both, in not seeking personal elevation while at the same time suffering exile, injustice and humiliation, were nevertheless exalted by the grace of God (Prov. 3:35). Thus Spurgeon comments:

By inheriting the land is meant obtaining covenant privileges and the salvation of God. Such as are truly humble shall take their lot with the rest of the heirs of grace, to whom all good things come by a sacred birthright.⁹

(2) It is delightful faith.

“And will [exquisitely] delight [עָנָו, *anog*, Isa. 58:14; 66:10-11] themselves in abundant prosperity/welfare/peace [שְׁלוֹמִים, *shalom*].” There is here both present anticipation, spiritual salvation, and future realization, enjoyment of unalloyed holy delight in God’s consummate, Messianic kingdom. Thus, “instead of shame you [the inhabitants of Zion] will have a double portion, and instead of humiliation they will shout for joy over their portion. Therefore they will possess a double portion in their land, everlasting joy will be theirs” (Isa. 61:7).

While the world is in an uproar concerning things that are vain and fleeting, the meek are quietly passing through earth to heaven. Their bosoms are not rent with angry passions. They have peace of conscience and peace with God. All this is but the prelude to the perfect rest and peace above, where the wicked cease from troubling, where providence will never frown, where ineffable smiles from the Redeemer’s face satisfy the longings of every mind.¹⁰

In a country where “abundant prosperity” is automatically interpreted in material terms, while American souls continue to be famished and appear so lacking in spiritual nourishment, the only satisfying solution is the pathway of the “humble” who will best show the way to a place of rest, “the Lord’s land,” and His banqueting table. There “they drink their fill of the abundance of Your house, and You give them to drink of the river of Your delights” (Ps. 36:8). Hence, “Why do you spend money for what is not

⁹ Spurgeon, *Treasury of David*, II, p. 191.

¹⁰ Plumer, *Psalms*, p. 451.

bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and delight yourself in abundance” (Isa. 55:2)

II. The present antagonism of the wicked confounded, vs. 12-26.

We return to the present tyranny and ultimate destiny of the flourishing wicked, as well as the perseverance of the godly in the face of such relentless, devilish, fiendish opposition. When a soldier, in the heat of battle, is assured of the victorious outcome of that same conflict, such knowledge encourages him to valiantly engage the enemy. Thus Bunyan portrays this eventual triumph of the believer in Christian’s battle with Apollyon.

Christian began to despair of life [having lost his sword]. But as God would have it, while Apollyon was fetching of his last blow, thereby to make a full end of this good Man, Christian nimbly reached out his hand for his Sword, and caught it, saying, ‘Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise’ (Matt. 7:8), and with that gave him a deadly thrust, which made him give back, as one that had received his wound. Christian perceiving that, made at him again, saying, ‘Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through him that loved us’ (Rom. 8:37). And with that Apollyon spread forth his dragon’s wings, and sped him away, that Christian for a season saw him no more (Jas. 4:7).¹¹

A. The scheming and scuttling of the wicked, vs. 12-15.

Here the pilgrimage of a child of God is not portrayed in terms of pleasantly sauntering down a primrose path! Rather traveling along this narrow, righteous way (Matt. 7:13-14) is more akin to an alert soldier or sailor with all of his weapons at the ready (Eph. 6:10-29), who faces a formidable enemy, in particular snipers, land mines, rocket propelled grenades, depth charges, torpedoes, etc. at every hand!

Christian, seek not yet repose;
 Cast thy dreams of ease away;
 Thou art in the midst of foes:
 Watch and pray.
 Principalities and powers,
 Mustering their unseen array,
 Wait for thy unguarded hours:
 Watch and pray.
 Gird thy heavenly armor on;
 Wear it ever, night and day;
 Ambushed lies the evil one:
 Watch and pray.

1. The scheming of the scoundrel, vs. 12, 14.

The enemies here are “the wicked,” “wrongdoers,” v. 1, “evildoers,” v. 9, “the enemies of the LORD,” v. 20, “the descendants of the wicked,” v. 28, “the violent man,” v. 35, “transgressors,” v. 38. This is a large army! The context indicates that they are tares within the community of God’s people, not overt pagans. Their incursion has been enabled through the lack of watchfulness (I Cor. 16:13; II Tim.

¹¹ Bunyan, *Works*, III, p. 113.

4:3-5). Thus they have entered unnoticed with their disguised liberal, man-centered teaching, as if by a side door (Gal. 2:4; II Pet. 2:1; Jude 4), speaking “plastic words,” πλαστοῖς λόγοις, *plastois logois* (II Pet. 2:3); their ultimate end is to savagely devour Christ’s sheep (Acts 20:29-30; John 10:12, 28).

a. His savage conspiracy, v. 12.

“The wicked plots against the righteous and gnashes at him with his teeth.” In other words, the wicked find the righteous intolerable, especially Incarnate Righteousness (Ps. 10:2; Mat. 26:3-4; John 1:5; 3:19; 5:16, 18; 7:1, 32; 8:59; 9:22; 10:39; 11:47-53). In the same way that there has been no peace between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman (Gen. 3:15), as with Cain and Abel, Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, etc. There may be social tolerance for a time; nevertheless deep down there is a loathing of authentic godliness. These evildoers are content in enduring formal religion; it is a serious interest in the righteousness of God and devotion to Jesus Christ that they recoil from. Hence their process of refutation and repudiation aims at elimination. David experienced concerted opposition so that, “at my stumbling they rejoiced and gathered themselves together; the smiters whom I did not know gathered together against me, they slandered me without ceasing. Like godless jesters at a feast, they gnashed at me with their teeth” (Ps. 35:15-16; cf. 7:1-2; 31:11-13; 38:11; 41:5-9). In this regard, it is well for the Christian to remember that that the Lord Jesus declared to His disciples: “A slave is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you” (John 15:20).

b. His combative confrontation, v. 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.” They conduct their anti-God agenda as if invincible, truly with hell-bent determination; they have considerable resources at their disposal; at a worldly level, their campaigning against Christianity is formidable. This is premeditated opposition, born of knowledge rather than ignorance. Furthermore, the intensity of this unmitigated evil is indicated by the innocence, virtue, lowliness, poverty, and seeming defenseless character of those facing imminent slaughter, as if mere cattle. Probably the taunt comes forth, “Where, now, is their God?” Nevertheless the faithful respond, “But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases. . . . He is their help and their shield” (Ps. 115:2-3, 9).

2. The scuttling of the scoundrel, vs. 13, 15.

While this earthly army, in all of its fury, is oblivious to God’s arousal in heaven, as well as the insidious nature of its own intense sinful contamination, like lemmings blindly following their devilish Pied Piper, like the charge of the Light Brigade, there yet hovers over them an overriding Holy Oversight that not only sees all, but also is aroused with righteous jealousy for His honor and His flock.

a. His divine denunciation, v. 13.

“The LORD laughs [צִיֵּץ, *sachaq*, cf. Ps. 2:4; Prov. 1:26] at him, for He sees his day coming.” Heaven is provoked by man’s astonishing impudence, his proud claims of autonomy, even his challenge toward God and His Son (Ps. 2:1-3), the response being rightful contempt and derision (Ps. 59:5-8). The reason is that God, in His sovereign wisdom, “has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed” (Acts 17:31). Hence, in that absolutely nothing that man interposes or schemes can delay this appointment with divine justice, God is moved to chortle as would any man when challenged by an ant or a flea! So Spurgeon comments:

The evil man does not see how close his destruction is upon his heels; he boasts of crushing others when the foot of justice is already uplifted to trample him as the mire of the streets. Sinners, in the hand of an angry God, and yet plotting against his children! Poor souls, thus to run upon the point of Jehovah’s spear.¹²

Thus as God is contemptuous of such extreme human arrogance, so the Christian, like “Christian” in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, learns to be similarly dismissive of Satanic assaults, even as John Newton has written.

Begone unbelief;
 My Savior is near,
 And for my relief
 Will surely appear:
 By prayer let me wrestle,
 And He will perform;
 With Christ in the vessel,
 I smile at the storm.
 Since all that I meet
 Shall work for my good,
 The bitter is sweet,
 The medicine is food;
 Though painful at present,
 ’Twill cease before long;
 And then, O how pleasant
 The conqueror’s song.

b. His righteous recompense, v. 15

“The sword will enter their own heart, and their bows will be broken.” The weapons here are those of v. 14, concerning which men boast in and claim their invincibility. Knowing that sin has a reflexive action, a divinely inbuilt backfire, David prefers this response from God rather than any personal retaliation. This indicates his acute sense of divine justice which he himself appreciated following his sinful numbering of the people (II Sam. 24:10-14). The whole point of “an eye for an eye” (Exod. 21:23-25; Lev. 24:19-20;

¹² Spurgeon, *Treasury of David*, II, p. 192.

Deut. 19:21) was that punishment should be appropriate, neither extreme nor superficial. So the justice of God has an exquisitely suitable quality, as with the punishment of Haman, he being hung on gallows of his own construction (Esther 7:9-10), being hoisted by his own petard. So Spurgeon comments that “Saul, who sought to slay David, [having been wounded by archers] fell on his own sword; and the bow, his favorite weapon, the use of which he taught the children of Israel, was not able to deliver him on Gilboa (I Sam. 28:4; 31:1-4).”¹³ Thus “all those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword” (Matt. 26:52; Rev. 13:10); “For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption” (Gal. 6:8). So then there are the timeless physical consequences of sexual immorality, the moral and immoral inevitability of cause and effect.

B. The investment and destiny of the righteous and wicked, vs. 16-22.

Whereas vs. 12-15 have focused exclusively on the investment and destiny of the wicked, now their worldly characteristics are sharply contrasted with those of the children of God. However the principle of inevitable reaping of a distinctive harvest because of distinctive sowing continues. Thus whatever the investments made in our present life may be, so there will also be resultant, commensurate dividends received at the end of this life. Hence there remains a marked distinction between the investing and resultant dividends of the Christian and the unbeliever, even as was the case with the building and destiny of the “wise man” in contrast with that of the “foolish man” (Matt. 7:24-27). Thus the fixed law of revealed truth and certain consequences is an inviolate principle in human life that no man or woman can escape from, however hard they may try. Hence, “He who has ears, let him hear” concerning sowing and reaping with regard to various soils, and the sowing and destiny of the wheat and the tares (Matt. 13:3-9, 37-43).

1. The superior investment of the righteous, vs. 16a, 21b.

To begin with, he is guided by a moral compass which is not mere vague, flexible ethics, but the concrete righteousness of the only true and living God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David. For him, “better is the little of the righteous,” v. 16a. Hence, in his business ventures as an employer, or in his demeanor as an employee, personal integrity is at the core of his toiling with his hands, his trading, his marketing strategy, his management policy. Thus his sense of values is such that he measures success, not simply in terms of material acquisition, but rather with regard to the degree to which he is “rich toward God” (Luke 12:21). He is concerned with heaven, not simply earth, the health of his soul, not simply his body, eternal life, not simply three score and ten years at best, or even a few years beyond, God in all of his holy glory, not simply mammon that passes through our fingers like sand. He is a man desirous of “great gain,” except that it is “godliness . . . accompanied by contentment” (I Tim. 6:6).

Furthermore, this person is also guided by much more than the profit motive whereby he bargains ruthlessly and grasps at all he can get; rather he “is gracious and gives,” v. 21b. He is no financial slouch when it comes to the prudent

¹³ Ibid.

investment of his capital, except that the dispersal of his proceeds is with an interest in the relief of others in need, as well as spiritual dividends (Luke 16:9). Similarly the godly woman “considers a field and buys it; from her earnings she plants a vineyard. She girds herself with strength and makes her arms strong. She senses that her gain is good; her lamp does not go out at night. She stretches out her hands to the distaff, and her hands grasp the spindle. She extends her hand to the poor, and she stretches out her hands to the needy. . . . [She is] a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised” (Prov. 31:16-20, 30).

2. The inferior investment of the wicked, vs. 16b, 21a.

“The abundance/great treasure [הַמֹּנִי, hamon] of the wicked, . . . the wicked borrows/mutually deals [לָוָה, lavah, cf. v. 26] and does not pay back.” The word for “abundance” here, not as v. 11, has the essential meaning of noise, commotion (cf. Eccles. 5:10), that is the tumult of those who so desperately pursue and promote material advancement; they noise abroad their ostentatious opulence. They loudly compete with regard to the car they drive, the estate they develop, the vacations they plan, the clothes they wear, the food they eat, the names they drop. However, in the desperation of pursuing this acquisitive, flamboyant lifestyle, there is no controlling root of the righteousness of God, as with the child of God, v. 16a; rather selfishness reigns. Hence the wicked are swindlers who employ all manner of scams, Ponzie schemes, multi-level marketing frauds, insider trading rackets, and shakedowns. They borrow with hollow promises, that is without any intention of paying back in full, even though they have the resources to do so. They mingle in the religious environment of Israel, but only in a formalistic sense. Hence they have no sense of ultimate accountability before God, a pay-day some day! Thus these clever rogues make the headlines in society as being examples of “success,” as paragons of enviable attainment, as models for those who aspire to achieve in this world. How sad it is when the professing Christian, in struggling with his limited resources, yields to the temptation to embrace what charlatans promote as the “prosperity gospel,” which in fact is a religious shakedown! Many a church has been invaded by those religious scoundrels who assess it in terms of marketing potential, as Mr. By-ends represents in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, so that they might establish an Amway or Mary Kay clientele. He participated in Christianity only when able to walk in silk or satin slippers with the wind behind him; he also viewed church life as an opportunity for personal advancement, even insofar as a pastor seeking a more prosperous pastorate is concerned!

3. The inferior destiny of the wicked, vs. 17a, 20, 22b.

“For the arms of the wicked will be broken, . . . 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. . . . But those cursed by Him will be cut off.” Eventually the law of man catches up with some of the rascals of this life, though by no means all. However, because this is a moral universe under the dominion of a holy God, the justice of this God ultimately calls all to account, when He “will judge the secrets of men through Jesus Christ” (Rom. 2:16). There is no suggestion here of David or the deprived child of God who lacks worldly prosperity, taking the

law into their own hands. Rather, it is the intervention of God that brings about a reckoning, of penal settlement, of divine violence, of appointed desolation. The reason is that the enemies of true believers are enemies of God, and He is well able to vindicate His cause! The once flaunted arms that bent the bow against the godly will be disabled (10:15; 73:18-20, 27). The blooming of the wicked will only be for a season; then will come the withering heat of the summer that results in a barren, hard-baked landscape. Thus the wicked “are like chaff which the wind dries away. . . . the way of the wicked will perish” (Ps. 1:4, 6). Hence the wicked will be exiled into an eternal wilderness where there will be “weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt. 24:51; 25:30), whereas the children of God will be “evergreens,” “perennials,” having divinely bestowed “possessions” (Matt. 24:27), “abundance” (Matt. 25:29). Thus, “cursed is the man who trusts in mankind and makes flesh his strength, and whose heart turns away from the LORD. For he will be like a bush in the desert and will not see when prosperity comes, but will live in stony wastes in the wilderness, a land of salt without inhabitant. Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD and whose trust is the LORD. For he will be like a tree planted by the water, that extends its roots by a stream and will not fear when the heat comes; but its leaves will be green, and it will not be anxious in a year of drought nor cease to yield fruit” (Jer. 17:5-8).

4. The superior destiny of the righteous, vs. 17b, 18-19, 22a.

“But the Lord sustains the righteous, . . . The Lord knows the days of the blameless, and their inheritance will be forever. They will not be ashamed in the time of evil, and in the days of famine they will have abundance [cf. v. 25]. . . . For those blessed by Him will inherit the land.” Who are the righteous? Here is a plain indication of the fundamental, biblical, gospel principle, that “the righteous will live by his faith [in the LORD]” (Hab. 2:2-4; cf. Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38). Thus this Lord savingly preserves those who truly “trust,” “delight in,” and “commit their way” to Him, vs. 3-6. So the man “who delights in the law of the LORD, . . . will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither, and in whatever he does, he prospers” (Psalm 1:2-3). For all of the seeming struggles of life in a world of darkness and uncertainty, the “days of the blameless [righteous]” will be sovereignly preserved (Rom. 8:37-39) while their destiny in the kingdom of Christ is guaranteed, v. 29. These children of God and their earthly course are “known” according to vital union (1:6; II Tim. 2:19), hence their destiny is that “their inheritance will be forever.” Thus, in contrast with the transient nature of the wicked, these saints of God, because they are “blessed by Him,” have the hope of “eternal life,” they will “inherit the land,” or appropriate the promised place of rest; they have “an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven” (I Pet. 1:4).

With this certain hope, these “righteous” or “blameless” are not swayed by the terrors of the present, the relentless ridicule and scorn of the wicked. They count themselves as Paul who, with his fellow-workers, declared that they were “sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing, yet possessing all things” (II Cor. 6:10). They declare that, “though the fig tree should not blossom and there be no fruit on the vines, though the yield of the olive should fail and the fields produce no food, though the flock should be cut off

from the fold and there be no cattle in the stalls, yet I will exult in the LORD, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation. The Lord GOD is my strength, and He has made my feet like hind's feet, and makes me walk on my high places" (Hab. 3:17-18).

C. The backsliding and frontsliding of the righteous, vs. 23-26.

The terminology of the "righteous" and the "blameless" thus far may lead one to conceive of David addressing believers of exceptional spiritual status. Yet we need to remember that it is indeed David, confessedly the profound and notable royal sinner, who speaks this way. Further, we now consider the reflections of this senior, wiser child of God who has many experiences to brood over and thus better advise a younger believer. Once again, the life of a true believer is considered as a unique way of righteousness, while at the same time there are many other ways of unrighteousness that also confront us (vs. 5, 7, 23, 34; cf. 1:6; 35:6; 86:11; 101:2, 6; 119:1); this right way involves a distinctive pilgrimage, a straight course (Matt. 7:13-14) along which we take many steps, while at the same time there are many opportunities to trip and fall due to the intervention of those who either watch us run or themselves become pseudo contestants. Hence, recovery and its evident fruit are most vital concerns for David, especially according to his own experience.

1. The frontsliding of the man of God, v. 23.

"The steps of a [good] man are established/firmly appointed [כִּנִּי, kun, cf. 24:1-2; 96:10] by the LORD, and He delights/has pleasure in his way." David is describing an authentic man of God and his spiritual progress under divine, covenantal sovereignty (I Sam. 2:9; Ps. 40:2). Indeed, God obtains great satisfaction in so ordering the life of His child, His progeny; further, He will deliver him even when distressed because "He delights in him" (22:8). Although this path may lead through a howling wilderness (Deut. 32:9-10), yet it is appointed to arrive at a land flowing with milk and honey (Jer. 11:5). Thus, in spite of such a testing transition, this child of God will consequently have "delight . . . in the LORD," v. 4. Hence an important sequence here concerns the truth that only through the establishment of the Lord to begin with can there be resultant delight in the way that is divinely laid out before us.¹⁴ A further significant sequential point that we now consider is that backsliding only concerns a person who has first experienced frontsliding. Only an authentic child of God, yes, he whose steps have been established by the LORD, is able to backslide, otherwise he is an apostate. David knew that his life had been ordered by the Lord, especially in terms of irrevocable covenantal promise (I Sam. 16:12-13; II Sam. 7:8-29). Thus God declared: "I will not break off My lovingkindness from him [David], nor deal falsely in My faithfulness. My covenant I will not violate, nor will I alter the utterance of My lips. Once I have sworn by My holiness; I will not lie to David. His descendants shall endure forever and his throne as the sun before Me. It shall be established forever like the moon, and the witness in the sky is faithful" (Ps. 89:33-37). And David also knew that his being kept was according to sovereign grace that was

¹⁴ It is possible to translate here, "And He delights in his way," which is supported by the parallelism, or "And he delight in His way," supported by the thought of Proverbs 10:28-32.

greater than all of his sin, from which he was always rescued, pardoned, and sanctified.

2. The backsliding of the man of God, v. 24.

“When he falls/stumbles [נָפַל, *naphal*] he will not be [irretrievably] hurled headlong, because the LORD is the One who holds his hand.” If David is led to give personal testimony, then there is also a place for this preacher/teacher to do the same. This writer remembers, as a child, walking to church with his father along a segmented concrete pavement. The sections were quite uneven so that it was easy for a five year old to trip over these and fall. I remember my father saying to me, “Barry, let us see if you can walk down Agnes Avenue without tripping over once. Of course he would hold my hand so that when, nevertheless, I did stumble, happily I would find myself dangling from my Father’s strong hand. Though I often fell, he was always there to stop me from falling so as to injure myself. In Psalm 73 Asaph describes his backsliding in that he was, “envious of the arrogant as I saw the prosperity of the wicked,” v. 3. Then he commences frontsliding by confessing: “When my heart was embittered and I was pierced within, then I was senseless and ignorant; I was like a beast before You,” vs. 21-22. Then he admits, “Nevertheless I am continually with You; You have taken hold of my right hand. With Your counsel You will guide me, and afterward receive me to glory,” vs. 23-24. However the destiny of the unbeliever is, by stark contrast, quite different. “Surely You set them in slippery places; You cast them down to destruction. How they are destroyed in a moment! They are utterly swept away by sudden terrors!” vs. 18-19.

3. The sovereign preservation of the man of God, v. 25.

“I have been young and now am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken or his descendants begging bread.” God’s sovereign keeping of the stumbling saint in v. 24 continues to be David’s interest and recommendation. It may well be akin to the care of the shepherd who seeks after the one perishing sheep. “So it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish” (Matt. 18:12-14; cf. Luke 14:4-7). Hence,

The soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose
I will not, I will not desert to its foes;
That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,
I’ll never, no never, no never forsake!

Thus the parallelism here equates the righteous not being forsaken with their not being humiliated, and thus lacking God’s benevolent care, even in the presence of his enemies (Ps. 23:5). Nevertheless, have not the children of God at times lacked food and known deprivation? Yes, though David, in his senior years and reflection upon God’s dealings with him, denies this! The best explanation is that of Hengstenberg:

[T]he discourse here is of *continued* desertion and destitution. David himself had often to complain that the Lord had forgotten him [Ps. 22:1; 10:1], he had in his poverty to beseech the rich Nabal for bread, and the object of the Psalm is precisely to meet the temptation which grows up to the righteous from temporary desertion. .

. . (Complete impoverishment belonged to the punishments which were threatened to the impious transgressors of the law (Deut. 28:15-45)).¹⁵

This is the point of v. 24, namely that though the child of God should fall, yet he will recover through the Lord's eventual sovereign intervention. Further David reassures his questioning addressees, his "seed," his covenant lineage, that they as well will be kept secure

4. The subsequent benevolence of the man of God, v. 26.

"All day long he is gracious and lends, and his descendants are a blessing." Again, as with v. 23, we consider whether the personal pronouns here, and also v. 25, refer to God, or David as in the NASB and most translations. In following the common understanding, the righteous are like their divine Benefactor; that is they are constantly generous even as is the Lord; the result is that their "seed" are similarly both beneficiaries and benevolent. "Many wish them well for their father's sake. His example was of great service in forming their principles and habits."¹⁶ This is in stark contrast with the wicked person who "borrows and does not pay back," v. 21 (cf. Isa. 32:5-8). Thus David is not simply testifying to his audience from personal experience, but exhorting "his descendants/seed" according to vs. 27, 34. Thus Spurgeon comments:

The righteous are constantly under generous impulses; they do not prosper through parsimony [stinginess], but through bounty. Like the bounteous giver of all good, of whom they are the beloved sons, they delight in doing good. How stingy covetous professors can hope for salvation is a marvel to those who read such verses as this in the Bible.¹⁷

Consequently there is family blessing for the children of David, even as they are of the same nature as their benevolent father.

III. The present exhortation of the saint, vs. 27-34.

David continues to have a fatherly interest in his "seed," that is not only their deliverance from seductive, spiritually debilitating engagement with the world, but also their following in his godly steps along a course that years of experience have forged. Hence the wise child of God will heed this advice (Ps. 107:43; Prov. 13:1).

A. The opening admonition, v. 27.

"Depart from evil and do good, so you will abide/dwell forever" (cf. vs. 3-6; 34:14 Here is a call to personal holiness that involves both negative and positive aspects (Isa. 1:16-17; Acts 26:18; I Pet. 2:9). The "good," טוב, *tob*, here, cf. v. 3, in contrast with evil, is that which is morally attractive in the sight of God, but especially in an active and practical sense. The good here contrasts with the activity of "evildoers" and "wrongdoers," v. 1; it is the good, the admirable righteousness that God personifies

¹⁵ E. W. Hengstenberg, *Works*, VI, p. 36.

¹⁶ Plumer, *Psalms*, p. 455.

¹⁷ Spurgeon, *Treasury of David*, II, p. 195.

(Ps. 11:1, 29), that He communicates (Ps. 119:68; 125:4), and here demands of His creation. So we sing:

Yes, God is good—in earth and sky,
 From ocean depths and spreading wood,
 Ten thousand voices seem to cry:
 God made us all, and God is good.
 For all Thy gifts we bless Thee, Lord,
 But chiefly for our heavenly food;
 Thy pardoning grace, Thy quickening word,
 These prompt our song, that God is good.

And so our mind and heart acquaintance with the goodness of God should lead to both aspiration and accomplishment of this goodness in the lives of His children. He in turn promises that such genuine pilgrim's will “abide/dwell forever [in the land]” of covenant promise, v. 29, “a good and spacious land, . . . a land flowing with milk and honey” (Exod. 3:8), a place of promised rest (Heb. 4:9-11).

B. The vindication of obedience, vs. 28-33.

When the righteous desire to fulfill the directive of v. 27, there are consequences that David desires to point out which in turn are intended to encourage pilgrims as they journey. These involve divine approval, promised blessing, and opposition from the wicked. Similarly in training children and seeking their obedience, we stress parental approbation, reward, and the distraction of disobedient young people in the neighborhood.

1. The desire of the LORD, v. 28.

“For the LORD loves [the execution of] justice and does not forsake His godly ones; they are preserved forever, but the descendants of the wicked will be cut off.” The priority of pleasing the LORD, as distinct from personal advancement, is significant. The healthy child loves that which his parents loves; God loves “justice,” מִשְׁפָּט, mishpat, that is the enacting of a good verdict, the right administration of His righteousness (Eccles. 11:14), and thus His children have an identical interest, v. 30 (cf. Exod. 23:6). So the affection of the child of God is of vital importance here, not mere outward conformity. But further, it is the justice of God, His moral integrity that safely keeps His saints as “the apple of His eye” (Ps. 17:8), and this truth is at the heart of the gospel of God's saving righteousness (Rom. 1:16-17; 3:21-26). He will never abandon them, because of New Covenant faithfulness (Jer. 31:31-37; Heb. 8:7-13). However the wicked, but especially their seed, have no such security. The point is that as the child of God emulates its Father with resultant blessing, so the child of the wicked emulates its father with resultant cursing and divine abandonment, as with the house of Jeroboam (Amos 7:9, 17) and Ahab (I Kings 21:20-24). There is such a thing as a godly heritage, and woe betide those who, like Esau, trade it for a mess of pottage. In other words, conception establishes consequences; our parentage establishes performance; our begettal establishes behavior; our sowing establishes what we reap! There are national implications here, even as King David instructs his subjects (II Sam. 7:1; 8:15; Ps. 72:1-3; Prov. 14:34; Jer. 23:5-6).

2. The inheritance of the righteous, v. 29.

“The righteous [who administer justice] will inherit the land and dwell in it forever.” Figuratively speaking, the child of God will receive his promised inheritance of permanent rest and refreshment; the “blameless man, . . . the upright man [is] the man of peace [and rest],” v. 37. Hence, “Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth [the land?]” (Matt. 5:5). However here the “land,” ארץ, *erets*, has specific prominence, vs. 3, 9, 11, 18, 22, 27, 34, but especially because it is the inheritance based upon God’s unilateral contract with the seed of Abraham (Gen. 12:1-7). By way of summary, this faith entitlement involved:

- a. The land as promise, according to God’s irrevocable covenant, sworn oath (Gen. 15:18-21; Exod. 12:25; Deut. 6:3; 19:8).
- b. The land as holy, that is set apart by God who is holy, from other lands for inhabitation by His people (Ex. 15:13; Zech. 2:12-13).
- c. The land as God’s possession, so that the people of Israel, as His redeemed children, are tenants since “the land is Mine” (Lev. 25:23).
- d. The land as God’s gift, was according to God’s gracious bestowal to Abraham and his descendants (Deut. 1:20, 25; 2:29).
- e. The land as the fathers’ possession, that is Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, hence subsequent generations (Gen. 31:3; 48:21; Exod. 33:1).
- f. The land as the nation of Israel’s inheritance, possession, permanent dwelling place, according to covenant promise (Gen. 12:7; 15:7; 24:7; 28:4; 36:43; 40:15).
- g. The land as security, blessing, and rest, a place flowing with milk and honey, hence material and spiritual prosperity (Exod. 33:3; Lev. 20:24).
- h. The land as the center of the world, that is its navel, the intention being that it will be a blessing to the world (Ezek. 5:5; 38:12).
- i. The land as God’s dwelling place with His people, especially in holy and intimate union (Ps. 37:9, 11, 22, 29, 34; 132:13-15; Isa. 1:19).

All of this is in anticipation of that time when, “all your people [Jacob, v. 16] will be righteous; they will possess the land forever, the branch of My planting, the work of My hand, that I may be glorified,” (Isa. 60:20). Jerusalem and the land will be restored, as “a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD (Isa. 62:3). Although formerly humiliated and “Forsaken, . . . Desolate,” it will be married [Beulah] to the Lord (Isa. 62:4-5); at that time, “a land will be born in a day, . . . a nation will be brought forth all at once” (Is. 66:8). Then, to Jerusalem, the Lord will “extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the nations like an overflowing stream” (Isa. 66:12; cf. 60:3, 12, 14; 61:6-7; 62:2).

3. The expression of the righteous, v. 30.

“The mouth of the righteous utters wisdom, and his tongue speaks justice.” Here the synonymous parallelism stresses a fundamental principle of cause and effect. According to the preceding characteristics of “the righteous,” v. 29, described as “doing good,” v. 27, and “loving justice,” 28, more specific instances now follow involving bodily expression of the mouth, tongue, heart, and feet, vs. 30-31. Here the “mouth” and the “tongue” express “wisdom” and “justice” because “the law of his God is in his heart,” v. 31. So, according to the principle of Matthew 15:17-19, it is the heart that ventilates through the mouth (Rom. 3:13-18; Jas. 1:14-15). By implication the wicked speak foolishness and injustice, that is “deceit,” (Ps. 14:8, 11), so that “with the mouth of the foolish, ruin is at hand” (Prov. 10:14); “it spouts folly,” “feeds on folly,” and “pours out evil things” (Prov. 15:2, 14). However, “a fool’s mouth is his ruin” (Prov. 18:7), but “words from the mouth of a wise man are gracious” (Eccles. 10:12); his instruction brings “healing to the bones” (Prov. 23-24). Thus what a man *spontaneously* speaks tells us what is inside. Consequently, a fountain cannot send forth both fresh and bitter water (Jas. 3:11), only a consistent steam based upon a deep source. This leads us to the conclusion that the only hope of a man whose verbal streams are polluted is the cleansing of the root cause. Thus John Newton tells us that as a consequence of his conversion, precipitated by a northern Atlantic storm, “I was quite freed from the habit of swearing, which seemed to have been deeply rooted in me as a second nature.”¹⁸ Of course a man may fabricate language so as to convey deceitfully a religious aura, even though at its root his soul is corrupt. So David describes such an imposter: “His speech was smoother than butter, but his heart was war; his words were softer than oil, yet they were drawn swords” (Ps. 55:21). Thus knowing the proneness of his own heart to deceitfulness, David prays: “Let the words of my *mouth* and the meditation of my *heart* be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my rock and my Redeemer” (Ps. 19:14). He desired consistency with both the root and verbal fruit of his life according to God’s assessment.

4. The constraining law of God, v. 31.

“The law/instruction/teaching/direction [תּוֹרָה, torah; LXX, νόμος, nomos] of his God is in his heart/inner man/mind [לֵב, leb]; his steps do not slip/slide/totter.” Here is the dynamic source of righteous and prudent speech, v. 30. In New Testament terms it is “doctrine/teaching [διδασκαλία, didaskalia] . . . for training in righteousness” (II Tim. 3:16; cf. I Tim. 4:13, 16; 5:17). However, the effect of this divine truth is upon the child of God’s whole being and thus includes a sense of direction or the regulation of mobility in his life, via preservation of “his steps.” Surely these are not so much physical steps as concerning the moral course of his life (Ps. 23:3-4; 26:1;). But what is it to slip? It is to veer from the straight pathway (Matt. 7:14), as was the struggle of Christian in the Valley of Humiliation:

¹⁸ Josiah Bull, ‘But Now I See,’ *The Life of John Newton*, p. 27.

[F]or when he sought, in the dark, to shun the ditch on the one hand, he was ready to tip over on the other; also when he sought to escape the mire, without great carefulness he would be ready to fall into the ditch.¹⁹

Asaph tells us how, in a situation similar to that of David's hearers: "[My] feet came close to stumbling, my steps had almost slipped. For I was envious of the arrogant as I saw the prosperity of the wicked" (Ps. 73:2-3). Here the focus was more upon the perspective of man, not the "law/instruction of God." Upon returning to "the sanctuary of God," then a whole new perspective and recovery of stability resulted (Ps. 73:17-20, 25-28). How does the Word of God prevent this stumbling? More is involved here than mere ingestion of biblical data, as important as this is. Rather there must be the indwelling Holy Spirit working with the indwelling/implanted Word (Jer. 31:33; Jas. 1:21). Further, there must be sovereign, divine imposition upon my walking in this life (Ps. 18:36; 94:18), the assumption being that the child of God wears "gospel shoes" (Eph. 6:15) that never wear out (Deut. 29:5).

5. The murderous intent of the wicked, v. 32.

"The wicked spies upon the righteous and seeks to kill him." The godless man has evil intent in his nature; he finds the righteous man, along with his righteous legislation in society, to be intolerable. He plans to eliminate that which so aggravates his soul, except that as "the Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend/overpower it" (John 1:5), so the true disciple of Christ partakes of the same preservation, v. 33. "No sinner ever loved a saint. To do that is infallible evidence of conversion" (I John 3:14).²⁰ Rather, "men loved [ἀγαπάω, agapaō] the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil" (John 3:19); man loves a pig-pen existence in this world, that is a godless lifestyle, however outwardly well-groomed and cultured he may appear. As David knew what it was like to be "hated without cause" (Ps. 69:4; 109:2-3), so it was the experience of the Lord Jesus; He was hated "freely" (John 15:25), that is, there were no inherent reasons or grounds why He should be hated; the sole cause of this loathing was within the deliberate, malicious intent of "the world" (John 15:18). So Paul declares: "When we are [unjustly] slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things, even until now" (I Cor. 4:13). Nevertheless the early church responded, "rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name" (Acts 5:41).

6. The deliverance of the LORD, v. 33.

"The Lord will not leave him in his hand or let him be condemned when he is judged." Concerning the wicked, Asaph declares: "Surely You set them in slippery places; You cast them down to destruction. How they are destroyed in a moment! They are utterly swept away by sudden terrors!" (Ps. 73:18-19). However, for the child of God, "If I should say, 'My foot has slipped,' Your lovingkindness, O LORD, will hold me up" (Ps. 94:18). Here the believer seems to have been snared: "The proud have hidden a trap for me, and cords; they have spread a net by the

¹⁹ Bunyan, *Works*, III, p. 114.

²⁰ Plumer, *Psalms*, p. 456.

wayside; they have set snares for me” (Ps. 140:5). So he has prayed: “Keep me from the jaws of the trap which they have set for me, and from the snares of those who do iniquity. Let the wicked fall into their own nets, while I pass by safely” (Ps. 141:9-10). He further cries out in distress, “when my spirit was overwhelmed within me,” because of the prospect of hidden traps that are ahead (Ps. 142:1-3). Nevertheless, “[although] the wicked have laid a snare for me, yet I have not gone astray from Your precepts” (Ps. 119:110). Thus, “Blessed be the LORD, who has not given us to be torn by their teeth. Our soul has escaped as a bird out of the snare of the trapper; the snare is broken and we have escaped” (Ps. 124:6-8).

David also seems to anticipate a formal trial when wicked men might even be so bold as to litigate against the believer, either in this life or at the Day of Judgment. Nevertheless, “there is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. . . . Who will bring a charge against God’s elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us” (Rom. 8:1, 34).

C. The closing admonition, v. 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.” “Wait” here is a command of stimulation rather than legal coercion. It is a synonym for “trust” and “delight” and “commit” and “rest” in vs. 3-5, 7, 9. At the same time the child of God is to stay the divinely appointed course, the straight path, that is “keep His way,” v. 23 (cf. Ps. 25:8, 12; 119:1, 14; 139:24; Prov. 21:16). What exactly is “His way”? It is the way of righteousness (Ps. 84:11; 119:3; Prov. 2:20) that contrasts with the way of the wicked (Prov. 15:9). However, to *not* “wait for the Lord” is to act upon anxiety, the result being a critical spirit concerning life’s circumstances, v. 1 (cf. Ps. 73:2-14), along with restlessness that often results in carnal attempts to “rectify” a seeming unjust situation. Whereas the faithful child of God rests in God timing and eventual just settlement, vs. 35-37.

The preceding reference to a final day of judgment in which the wicked attempt to indict the righteous is now seen from a different perspective, that of divine vindication. Hence, those who “wait” will “inherit the land,” that is the place of consummate promised blessing. At the same time the righteous will witness the eventual judgment and dismissal of the wicked. This seems to be a climactic end times scenario when the child of God is graciously exalted and the child of the devil is justly debased in being consigned to hell. In the meanwhile, the believer will “wait for the LORD and keep His way.” He is like the character Patience, who contrasts with Passion, in Bunan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. We read that:

The Governor of them [Passion and Patience] would have him [Passion] stay for his best things till the beginning of the next year; but he will have all now; but patience is willing to wait. . . . Passion will have all now this year, that is to say, in this world; so are the men of this world; they must have all their good things now, they cannot stay till next year, that is, until the next world, for their portion of good. . . . Patience has the best wisdom, and that upon many accounts. First, because he stays [waits] for the best things. Second, and also because he will have the glory of his, when the other has nothing but rags. . . . He, therefore, that hath his portion first, must needs have a time to spend it; but

he that hath his portion last, must have it lastingly; . . . Then I perceive [said Christian] it is not best to covet things that are now, but to wait for things to come.²¹

So Charles Wesley directs us:

From the world of sin and noise,
And hurry I withdraw;
For the small and inward voice
I *wait* with humble awe;
Silent am I now and still,
Dare not in Thy presence move;
To my *waiting* soul reveal
The secret of Thy love.

IV. The present destiny of the sinner and the saint, vs. 35-40.

Now David stresses all the more the evident distinction between the wicked man and the righteous man, both in terms of their earthly sojourn as well as their ultimate destiny. In the same vein, life is not simply about present achievement and acquisition in the economy of man but rather future estimation and reward in the sight of God.

A. The temporal prosperity of the wicked, vs. 35-36.

Here is a timeless vignette that is played out in both the news pages and the obituary columns of our newspapers every day. Just roam the cemeteries of our land and consider the crumbling memorials and faded glory of the formerly great. Unlike more youthful believers, David, in his senior years, has the advantage of hindsight.

1. His growing affluence, v. 35.

“I have seen a wicked, violent man spreading himself like a luxuriant/stately tree [as a cedar of Lebanon] in its native soil.” This man of worldly achievement is like Israel (Matt. 21:18-19), even as Matthew Henry describes a tree “which produceth all leaves and no fruit.”²² This is the same cry of Asaph concerning the lifestyle of the wicked: “For there are no pains in their death, and their body is fat. They are not in trouble as other men, nor are they plagued like mankind. Therefore pride is their necklace; the garment of violence covers them. Their eye bulges from fatness; the imaginations of their heart run riot. They mock and wickedly speak of oppression; they speak from on high. They have set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue parades through the earth” (Ps. 73:4-9). However, from whence comes this lush, verdant, fruitless foliage? It is being rooted “in its native soil,” that is the soil of this world, like “a bush in the desert” rather than “a tree planted by the water” (Jer. 17:5-8).

From “I have seen,” it seems that David’s perspective is one of recollection of the past rather than present infatuation with the attainments of men of this world. The younger brethren may have been enticed by the present, but they need to come full circle from lusting to joyous evangelism, as did Asaph (Ps. 73:17-28).

²¹ Bunyan, *Works*, III, p. 99.

²² Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary*, III, p. 376.

2. His fading importance, v. 36.

“Then he passed away, and lo, he was no more; I sought for him, but he could not be found.” Here is the perspective that the flourishing man of this world intentionally ignores. He is as the rich man who was denounced by God in Christ’s parable: “‘You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared.’ So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God” (Luke 12:20-21). Consider Alexander the Great who, having conquered much of the world, while reveling and feasting in Babylon, yet catches a fever and dies aged 32 in 323 B.C. What does it profit a man if he amasses a fortune, yet he remains friendless because of trampling on others, his marriage is a farce, and his children forsake him. But even worse, “For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul” (Mark 8:36). Solomon saw the vanity of such a life that chiefly invests in this world and tells us: “I have seen all the works which have been done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and striving after wind. . . . I said to myself, ‘Behold, I have magnified and increased wisdom more than all who were over Jerusalem before me; and my mind has observed a wealth of wisdom and knowledge.’ And I set my mind to know wisdom and to know madness and folly; I realized that this is also striving after wind. Because in much wisdom there is much grief, and increasing knowledge results in increasing pain. . . . I said to myself, ‘Come now, I will test you with pleasure. So enjoy yourself.’ And behold, it too was futility. . . . He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves abundance with its income. This too is vanity” (Eccles. 1:14, 16-18; 2:1; 5:10).

B. The eternal prosperity of the upright, vs. 37.

“Mark the blameless/morally whole [תָּמִים, tamim, cf. v. 18; 15:2] man, and behold the upright/morally straight [יָשָׁר, yashar, cf. v. 14; as with God, 25:8]; for the man of peace will have a [lasting] posterity/descendants [אַחֲרֵיתָּהּ, acharith, not as the wicked, v. 38].” In contrast with the immoral dealings of the “successful” entrepreneur, the enterprising scoundrel, whose external accomplishments hide internal turmoil of soul, there is “the man of peace/soul rest [שְׁלוֹם, shalom],” having spiritual prosperity. While his earthly possessions are not described, yet his heavenly inheritance will not be denied; further he has a guaranteed, blessed destiny, for “I am continually with You” (Ps. 73:23).

Thus the younger believers are encouraged by older David to consider the contrasting lives of men of achievement according to radically different criterion. On the one hand consider David’s perception, based upon years of experience, of those who have excelled at wickedness and violence, who have wholly given themselves over to carnal self-interest. While this perspective is necessary, nevertheless it will in no way edify; so we should take this experienced believer’s assessment as being quite sufficient. On the other hand “mark” the choice saints who have excelled at righteousness according to God’s standard; the learners here are to consider for themselves the lives of those who are manifestly virtuous, godly, spiritually accomplished. Here is a recommendation concerning the choice of mentors. Hence our reading should include edifying biography, as concerning Bunyan, Newton, Spurgeon, Lloyd-Jones, etc., not so much the exploits of despots. So, “remember those who led you, who spoke the Word of

God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith” (Heb. 13:8).

C. The temporal destiny of the wicked, v. 38.

“But transgressors/rebels [פְּשָׁעִים, pasha, cf. Ps. 51:13] will be altogether destroyed/exterminated [שָׁמַד, shamad, cf. Ps. 83:10]; the posterity of the wicked will be cut off.” Such rebellion has two stages: “First, the whole process of rebellion has independence in view (II Kings 1:1). . . . Second, the final result of rebellion is the state of independence (II Kings 8:20).”²³ God is the object of this rebellion, that is man takes steps to distance himself from God and also spends much time contemplating his enjoyment of being an alien of heaven and a citizen of his self-made domain. However, like Jonah. His attempt to run away from God results in His running into the inescapable presence of God (Jonah 1:1-2:9). Thus this man is mutinous in terms of God’s universe, except that he desires to retire to his own universe that is void of divine, holy interference, which at the same time places himself at its center. Yet in this instance, the transgressor is confronted with unavoidable accountability that results in judgment rather than mercy, concerning which there are two aspects. There is the personal prospect of “destruction” which is annihilation or extinction of the person from the world stage (Amos 9:8; Hag. 2:22), but not necessarily the soul. This is also because of the transgressor’s appointment to a day of future judgment (Job 21:30; Prov. 16:4; Dan. 12:2; Matt. 10:15; Heb. 9:27; II Pet. 2:9; Jude 6; Rev. 20:11-15). It is “destruction forevermore” in contrast with the Lord who is “on high forever” (Ps. 92:7-8). However there is also to be the annihilation of personal investment, the nullification of grand projects that prove to be mere sand castles washed away by the tides of time, the cutting off of one’s boasted heritage and seed thought to have been established in perpetuity.

D. The eternal salvation of the righteous, vs. 39-40.

The title, “the righteous,” and variations of this title, are used 45 times in the Book of Psalms, with the greatest frequency of 9 references in Psalm 37 (cf. vs. 12, 16, 17, 21, 25, 29, 30, 32, 39). Foundational to this designation of an Old Testament child of God is the character of God as “righteous” (7:11; 11:7; 103:6; 119:137; 129:4; 145:17), as with His revelation (19:9; 119:7, 62, 75, 106, 123, 144, 160, 164). The word for “righteous,” צַדִּיק, tsaddiq, means to be morally right and just, especially in God’s administration of His creation and government. So His active righteousness is the expression of His pure righteous essence. Thus He saves and preserves His children in righteousness, vs. 17, 25, 39, the result being that they respond with communicated righteousness, vs. 21, 30.

1. His salvation is of the Lord, v. 39.

“But the salvation of the righteous is from the LORD; He is their strength in time of trouble.” In addressing the righteous, being younger than David, there is assurance of the salvation of the saved in the present according to Philippians 1:6; II Corinthians 2:15. It is a salvation sourced in righteousness (Ps. 65:5). Here is

²³ Vine, Unger, White, *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, p. 266.

the promise of grace to transition rather than avoid trouble. Here is the essential principle that Jonah learned in the furnace of affliction, namely that “salvation is from the LORD” (Jonah 2:9). So Spurgeon well comments:

Sound doctrine this. The very marrow of the gospel of free grace. By salvation is meant deliverance of every kind; not only *the* salvation which finally lands us in glory, but all the minor rescues of the way; these are all to be ascribed unto the Lord, and to Him alone. Let Him have glory from those to whom He grants salvation.²⁴

2. His deliverance is of the Lord, v. 40.

“The LORD helps them and delivers them; he delivers them from the wicked and saves them, because they take refuge in Him.” The essential attitude of the believer here is that of faith described as being hid or secreted away in the Lord. It is faith that turns from the allurements and solicitations of this world so as to “delight oneself in the LORD,” v. 4. “You are my hiding place; You preserve me from trouble; You surround me with songs of deliverance” (Ps. 32:7). The believer is in this place because he believes in this saving God, not because he is righteous; yet because of his faith, God reckons him as righteous (Phil. 3:8-9). Here is intimacy of faith union in the bosom of God as a caring shepherd (Isa. 40:11). Here is the ultimate solution to the original problem of v. 1, as Isaac Watts has written concerning the whole Psalm.

O Lord, the steps of all Thy saints,
Are ordered by Thy will;
Though they should fall, they rise again;
Thy hand supports them still.
A heavenly heritage is theirs,
Their portion and their home;
Fed here below, and made the heirs
Of blessings yet to come.
Those haughty sinners, we have seen,
Not fearing man nor God,
Just like the bay tree, fair and green,
They spread themselves abroad.
But, lo! they vanish from the ground,
Destroyed by hand unseen;
No root, nor branch, nor leaf was found,
Where all that pride had been.
But mark the people of God's grace,
Their steps of life attend:
True pleasure runs through all their ways,
And peaceful is their end.

²⁴ Spurgeon, *Treasury of David*, II, p. 198.