

PSALM 1: TWO WAYS

INTRODUCTION

Psalms 1 & 2 function as a fitting introduction to the Psalter: “Psalm 1 sets the tone for much of the rest of the Psalter by contrasting the way of the righteous with the way of the ungodly and sets the stage for the hostility of the ungodly. Along with Psalm 2, it forms the introduction to the entire collection. Psalm 2, a royal psalm, lays out the connection between God’s rule and the human monarchy. Psalm 1 says nothing about the king, but it focuses on the way of the righteous that is to be lived out in accordance with the law of the LORD. Putting the two psalms together, we have the main themes of the book, the way the righteous are to live among the ungodly, and the salvation the righteous have in their divinely chosen king” (Ross, 182).

No superscription accompanies the psalm. This has led to a variety of theories regarding its date, authorship, and purpose. Some hold that it was composed specifically as an introductory piece for the Psalter, while others suggest it was first produced as an independent instructional psalm and later adopted as a fitting introduction to the entire corpus. Ultimately, there is no reliable means for dating the psalm with confidence, leaving the question of authorship open.

Regardless, Psalm 1 can be classified as a *wisdom psalm* (cf. Pss 32, 34, 49, etc.), and it carries a clear didactic function. It aims to instruct the reader in the contrast between the way of the righteous and the way of the wicked, with all of its characteristics, sources, and outcomes.

In this way, it reflects the other OT wisdom literature in general, with special associations with Proverbs (cf. Prov 2:2:12-15, 20-22).

It also functions in a broader way as an introduction to the final portion of the Hebrew Bible (the Writings). After the Torah, the two subsequent major portions (Prophets & Writings) both begin with an instruction to diligent meditation on Yahweh’s law (i.e., Torah) both day and night (Josh 1:8; Ps 1:2; cf. “day and night” in Gen 1:5).

ANALYSIS

1. The Way of the Righteous (vv. 1-3)

The psalm introduces two contrasting “ways” or paths that encapsulate the dichotomy that exists between the righteous and the ungodly. Even though only the “way of sinners” is mentioned here, by v. 6 we find that there is the “way of the righteous” and the “way of the ungodly.”

a. The Life of the Righteous (v. 1)

How happy is the one		Topical Statement
who does not walk	A	
in the counsel of the ungodly—	B	
in the way of sinners	B¹	
he does not stand	A¹	The righteous life
in the seat of scoffers	B²	
he does not sit	A²	

Notes:

b. The Delight of the Righteous (v. 2)

But rather

in the **law** of Yahweh → is his delight

and on his **law**

he **meditates**

day and night

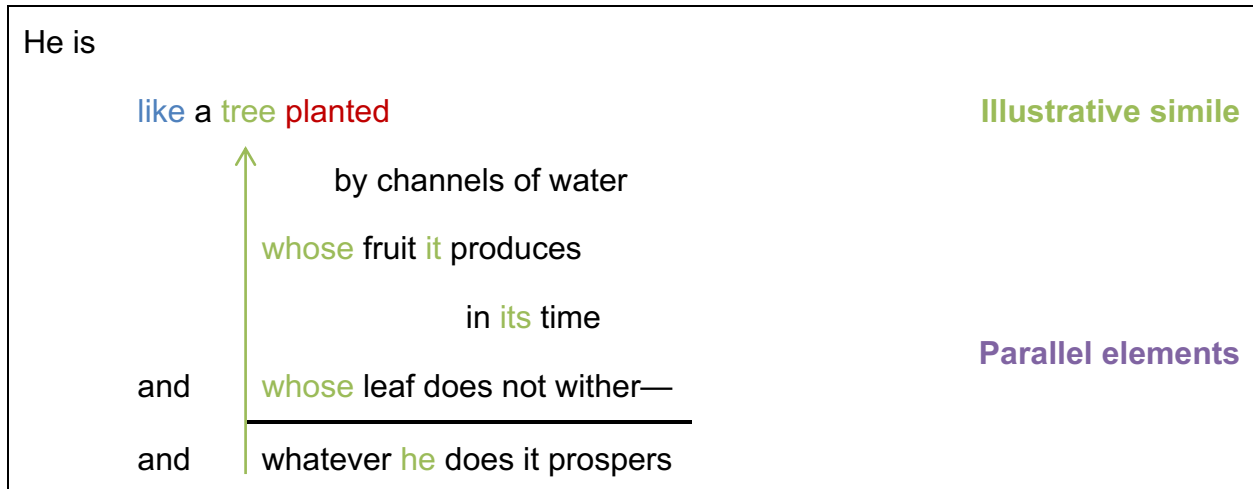
Strong adversative

Parallel concepts

Merism

Notes:

c. The Picture of the Righteous Person (v. 3)



Notes:

2. The Way of the Ungodly (vv. 4-6)

The second half of the psalm shifts from a focus on the righteous to the ungodly. Everything here is in contrast to what has come before. Whereas the godly person avoided the ways of the ungodly, and his life demonstrated the product of that decision, here the focus is on end result of the ungodly life.

a. The Picture of the Ungodly (v. 4)

Not so **the ungodly**—

New Subject

but rather

Adversative

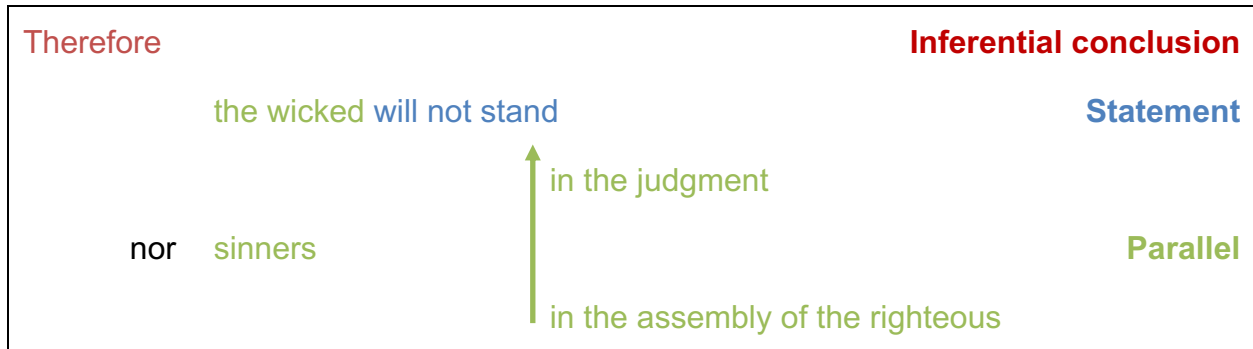
he is **like chaff**

Illustrative simile

which the wind scatters

Notes:

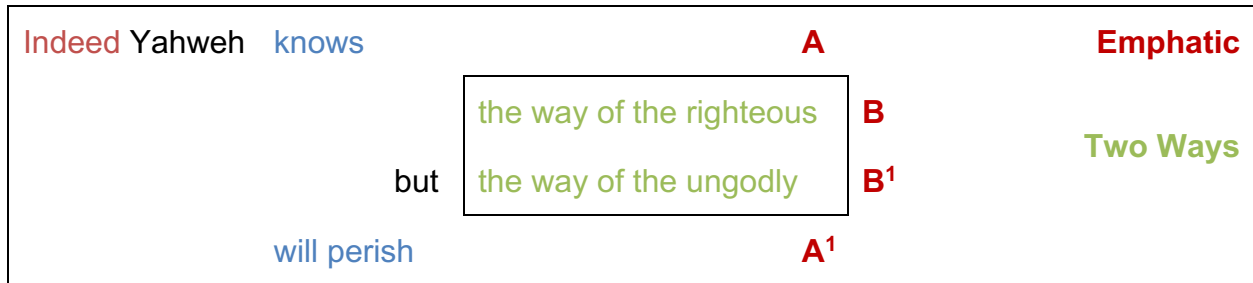
b. The Isolation of the Ungodly (v. 5)



Notes:

Introduction to the Psalms

c. The Destruction of the Ungodly (v. 6)



Notes: