

# PSALM 1

TWO WAYS



# Introduction

- ▶ Psalms 1 & 2 function as a preamble to the Psalter
- ▶ It introduces key concepts in the Psalter, including

- Righteous & ungodly
- Yahweh's Law
- God's sovereign rule
- God's anointed king

“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 the 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).



# Authorship

- ▶ No superscription
- ▶ Some suggest it was composed specifically to introduce the Psalter
- ▶ Others hold that it originated as an independent didactic poem
- ▶ Ultimately, there is no way to date the psalm with confidence or identify its author



# Genre

- ▶ Psalm 1 can be classified as a *wisdom psalm*
- ▶ It carries a didactic function
- ▶ It aims to instruct the reader in the contrast between the way of the righteous and the way of the ungodly, with all their characteristics, sources, and outcomes
- ▶ It reflects much of other OT wisdom literature, with special associations with Proverbs (cf. Prov 2:12-15, 20-22)
- ▶ The psalm also functions in a broader way to introduce the final section of the Hebrew Bible (cf. Josh 1:8; Gen 1:5)



# Verse 1

Topical statement of verse marked by special Hebrew accent and reinforced by alliteration

How happy is the one

who does not walk

in the counsel of the ungodly—

in the way of sinners

“Happy” = true, inner spiritual joy as opposed to fleeting, temporal emotion

he does not stand

in the seat of scoffers

he does not sit

# Verse 1

This is a clear mark of wisdom literature

How happy is the one

who does not walk

Subject of the verse, literally "the man" in Hebrew, but a common generic expression for any person. This psalm concerns anyone interested in godly living

This term occurs 25x in Psalms and 44x in this construction in the OT. Here it is used as an exclamatory statement..."O the happiness of the one..."

in the c

in the seat of scoffers

he does not sit



# Verse 1

How **happy** is the **one**

Triple alliteration ties line 2 back to the verse topic

The “happy one” is described with a triplet structure. The 1<sup>st</sup> triplet is set apart from 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>, making it logically equal in weight to the other two.

**who** does not **walk**

in the counsel of the ungodly—

Connotes one's conduct or way of life

in the way of sinners

he does not stand

in the seat of scoffers

he does not sit

The other two are more closely associated with each other



# Verse 1

The triplet structure is in a  
chiastic relationship to the 1st  
element

How happy is the one

who does not walk

**A**

The emphasis of the chiasm is  
on the central elements

in the counsel of the ungodly—

**B**

in the way of sinners

**B<sup>1</sup>**

he does not stand

**A<sup>1</sup>**

in the seat of scoffers

he does not sit



# Verse 1

The 3<sup>rd</sup> element extends the chiasm

How happy is the one

who does not walk

**A**

in the counsel of the ungodly—

**B**

in the way of sinners

**B<sup>1</sup>**

he does not stand

**A<sup>1</sup>**

in the seat of scoffers

**B<sup>2</sup>**

he does not sit

**A<sup>2</sup>**

The center also extends



# Verse 1

How happy is the one

The topical statement  
set apart

who does not walk

in the counsel of the ungodly—

in the way of sinners

he does not stand

in the s

he does not sit

The chiastic triplet describes the character of the topical statement. Thus, it is a summary of sin rather than representative of a progression of sinful behavior

Refers to adoption of their principles, following their advice, conforming to their values.

Cf. Job 10:3; 21:16; 22:18 for a true-life example of one who rejected walking in ungodly counsel



# Verse 2

Strong adversative...marks a stark contrast to v. 1

V. 1 = what he doesn't do  
V.2 = what he does

But rather

Refers to more than the legal texts of the OT, or the covenant texts.'

Law = "torah" = "instruction"

i.e., the whole Pentateuch

in the law of Yahweh is his delight

and on his law

he meditates

day and night

Notice the repetition of "law". This adds thematic emphasis and draws us to the focal point of the verse...Yahweh's law!

Continues the same pattern as v. 1...

...not in the counsel

...not in the path

...not in the seat

BUT RATHER

...in the law of Yahweh



VE

Merism...uses two extremes in order to represent the total. In other words, "all the time".

Two lines describe parallel concepts, not sequential action.

But Cf. Josh 1:8

in the law of Yahweh is his delight

and on his law

he meditates

In other words, the delight doesn't lead to meditation. The two actions are parallel and complementary

day and night

"Meditate" literally means "mutter" or "speak under one's breath". Describes the constant uttering of something that is always in the mind

Appears in the opening of the Prophets (Josh 1:8) and reflects the intent of Deut 6:7-9.

Christians are instructed to be "filled with the Word of Christ" (Col 3:16)



# Verse 3

This term in Hebrew is used as a special kind of syntactical element linking this new section to the vv. 1-2

He is

like a tree planted

A tree is the focus of the illustration.

Jer 17:7-8 & Ezek 17:8-10 utilize a tree to illustrate the godly individual

Introduces a comparative illustration

by channels of water

whose

"Planted" is a kind of passive verb known as a *divine passive*.

and whose

Even though unstated, God is the implied agent planting the tree

and whatever he does it prospers

Tree metaphors appear in other ANE literature, such as *The Teachings of Amenemope* from 12<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Egypt.

If borrowing occurred, it was free and creative

Can mean "planted" or "transplanted"



# Verse 3

He is

like a tree planted

by channels of water

All the pronouns  
reference back  
to the tree and  
describe it

whose fruit it produces  
in its time

and whose leaf does not wither

and whatever he does it prospers

In the metaphor, the  
channel of water pictures  
the law of Yahweh

This can refer to natural  
streams or irrigation  
channels.

The picture is of a tree  
securely planted by an  
ever-flowing stream of  
water.

Three parallel statements  
follow describing the tree

Just as v. 1 used a triplet  
pattern to describe what  
the godly person **avoids**,  
now v. 3 uses another  
triplet to describe what  
he **does**



# Verse 3

He is

like a tree planted

by channels of water

whose fruit it produces  
in its time

and whose leaf does not wither

and whatever he does it prospers

In the metaphor, the channel of water pictures the law of Yahweh

This can refer to natural streams or irrigation channels.

The picture is of a tree securely planted by an ever-flowing stream of water.

Three parallel statements follow describing the tree

The 3<sup>rd</sup> element is set apart from the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> and functions as a summary statement:

The tree is...  
productive  
resilient  
= prosperous



# Structure of vv. 1-3

## Verse 1

### Topical Statements

How happy is the one

**A**

who does not walk in the  
counsel of the ungodly

**B**

nor stand in the path  
of sinner

**C**

nor sit in the seat of scoffers

Inverted triplets  
arranged in chiasm

## Verse 3

He is like a tree planted by  
channels of water

**C<sup>1</sup>**

whose fruit it produces in its time

**B<sup>1</sup>**

and whose leaf does not wither

**A<sup>1</sup>**

and whatever he does it  
prosper

Unusual inclusio places focus  
on bracketing elements...both  
are summary statements



# What's the focus?

## Verse 1

Triplet describing  
what the godly  
person **avoids**

A ← → A<sup>1</sup>



B

## Verse 2

Emphatic  
focus of the  
Law of God

## Verse 3

Triplet describing  
what the godly  
person **does**



# Verse 4

Verse 4 commences with a strong emphatic comparative

The comparative references back to v. 1 concerning the “happy one”.

It functions to change the topic from the godly to the ungodly person, setting up a stark, dramatic comparison.

(Recall that the ungodly was first introduced in v. 1 as well)

Not so

the ungodly

but rather

like chaff

Interestingly, “ungodly” here is plural while “happy one” was singular...in other words, all the ungodly fit this description without exception

This also sets us up for “the one against the many” motif found frequently in the Psalms

A second strong adversative makes the contrast between the godly and ungodly person even more dramatic

which t

In fact, this same exact particle was used in v. 2 concerning the godly person to contrast what he **doesn't** do with what he **does**.

These echo back to v. 2 are very effective at setting up the comparison, which is the point of the psalm



# Verse 4

Not so the ungodly

but rather

like chaff

which the wind scatters

In fact, there is alliteration with these two terms...

“tree” = *ets* (like “ates”)

“chaff” = *motes*

This comparison echoes the language of v. 3

The comparison between the godly and ungodly centers on the powerful agricultural imagery of a tree and chaff—two extremely common items in ANE life.

The tree imagery = stability, vitality, health, prosperity

The chaff imagery = worthlessness, vulnerability, something destined for destruction

Winnowing and chaff are featured frequently in imagery concerning judgment and the separation of the ungodly from the righteous (cf. Isa 5:24; Matt 3:12)

The illustration pictures the worthless life of the ungodly and anticipates the judgment to come which is the topic of v. 5.



# Verse 5

Inferential conjunction drawing a logical conclusion from v. 4

"Since the ungodly are like worthless, wind-blown chaff, then of course..."

Therefore

This term repeats from v. 4

the ungodly

will not stand

in the judgment

nor sinners

Additionally, these two terms are repeated from v. 1

Like v. 1, "ungodly" is a summary term for "sinners". The two are in parallel here and thus are synonymous

The main verb of the verse.

It appears only once, but does double-duty...it is the implied action of the second line as well

the assembly of the righteous



# Verse 5

Therefore

The idea of “standing (arising) in judgment” may picture a defendant taking his stand to plead his case in a courtroom (Deut 19:15; Ps 27:12; Job 30:28)

Thus, the point of the statement may be to express the lack of any kind of defense on the part of the ungodly

the ungodly will not stand

in the judgment

However, the definite article on this term (**the** judgment) probably implies that this is picturing the future judgment at the end of the age

This is the first time this term is used to talk about the godly person.

Up until now, he is simply known as the “happy man”. Now we discover he is in fact the “righteous” who will appear throughout the remainder of the psalter

the assembly of the righteous



# Verse 5

THIS VERSE INTRODUCES A SERIES OF REVERSALS FROM V. 1

Note the repetition of “stand” from v. 1.

Though the terms are different, they are synonymous and intentionally linked

the ungodly will not stand  
in the judgment

This is a reversal of “the man who walks in the counsel of the ungodly” from v. 1.

The result of this “walk” is that he will “not stand in the judgment”

This is a reversal of “the man who stands in the path of sinners” from v. 1

The result of this “standing” is that he will “not stand in the assembly of the righteous”

nor sinners

in the assembly of the

In fact, they even sound similar:

Similarly, “assembly” references back to “counsel” in v. 1. The two terms appear frequently together as synonyms

“counsel” = *etsah*  
“assembly” = *edah*



# Repetitions

This psalm is about comparisons...

It compares the present characteristics of the godly with the future condition of the ungodly

## Verse 1

How happy is the man

who does not walk in the  
counsel of the ungodly

nor stands in the path of  
sinners

nor sit in the seat of scoffers

## Verse 5

Therefore the ungodly will  
not stand in the judgment

nor sinners in the assembly  
of the righteous

The numerous repetitions help to reinforce these comparisons by always keeping the characteristics of v. 1 in mind while we address to the description of the ungodly

# Verse 6

One of three functions:

1. Causal ("for," "because")
2. Explanatory ("since")
3. Emphatic ("indeed")

Regardless, the word links us back to v. 5. Whatever we read in v. 6, it relates directly to the summary statement of judgment in v. 5.

Indeed

Yahweh knows

This is the main verb of the clause.

It is a participle, and here it describes a characteristic action of Yahweh.

the way of the righteous

but the way of the ungodly

In this case, the particle seems to be emphatic. It reinforces the assertions of v. 5

This action describes God's normal mode of operation

"Knowing" speaks of intimate love and sovereign affection, not intellectual knowledge



# Verse 6

Chiastic arrangement

Focus is on the center of the chiasm

Indeed

Yahweh knows

A

the way of the righteous

B

The focus is on the comparison between the righteous and the godly

but the way of the ungodly

B<sup>1</sup>

More specifically, it compares the ways of the righteous and the godly

will perish

A<sup>1</sup>

“Way” refers to one's conduct, behavior, or manner of living, with all of its manners, goals, purposes, and impact



# Verse 5-6

The key words in vv. 5-6  
are arranged chiastically

v. 5 the ungodly

A

the righteous

B

the righteous

B<sup>1</sup>

v. 6

the ungodly

A<sup>1</sup>

Even though v. 6 ends with  
focus on the ungodly, the  
larger chiastic arrangement  
makes the overall focus on  
the righteous person



# Summary Observations

- ▶ The psalm compares the two “ways” of the righteous and the ungodly
- ▶ While the focus on the righteous is on their characteristics, the focus on the ungodly is on their future judgment
- ▶ The central focus is on the two images of the tree and the chaff, which powerfully illustrate these two ways



# Summary Observations

- ▶ **Verse 1:** The righteous person avoids the influences of ungodly people, resulting in an inner spiritual joy.
- ▶ **Verse 2:** The key to godly living is the righteous person's delight and continuous meditation on God's Word.
- ▶ **Verse 3:** God has (trans)planted believers into the fertile ground of his kingdom, giving them everything they need for spiritual life and vitality
- ▶ **Verse 4:** The future of the wicked are utterly different from that of the righteous.



# Summary Observations

- ▶ **Verse 5:** The ungodly cannot defend themselves in the final judgment. They are completely separated from the righteous.
- ▶ **Verse 6:** The end result of the righteous life is fellowship with God, while the result of the ungodly life is destruction.



# New Testament

- ▶ Jesus' conclusion to the Sermon on the Mount appears to reflect heavy influence from Psalm 1
- ▶ 7:13-14 focus on the contrast of the two ways—the narrow road vs. the wide road
  - ▶ Like Psalm 1, while the many follow the wide road (“the ungodly”), few follow the narrow road (“the righteous person”)
  - ▶ Like Psalm 1, one leads to life while the other leads to destruction



# New Testament

- ▶ 7:15-20 warns of false prophets, who are known by their fruit
  - ▶ The tree metaphor of Psalm 1 is reflected in the pictures of the healthy vs. the diseased tree
  - ▶ The righteous person is that tree which “bears its fruit in its time”
  - ▶ The ungodly person is that tree which is cut down and burned, like the chaff blown in the wind
- ▶ 7:21-23 warns that not all who appear to be the people of God are actually his people
  - ▶ The key term here is the word “know”
  - ▶ Just as God “knows” the way of the righteous, Jesus will not “know” everyone who claims to be his people