

Psalm 1

Hebrew Word Order

אֲשֶׁר־יְהוָה בֵּרַךְ אֶת־לֹא הֹלֵךְ בַּעֲצַת רָשָׁעִים
wicked-ones in-counsel-of he-walks not who the-man blessednesses-of (1:1)

וּבְדֶרֶךְ חַטָּאִים לֹא עֹמֵד וּבְמוֹשָׁב לְצִיִּים לֹא יָשֵׁב:
he-sits not ones-mocking or-in-seat-of he-stands not sinners or-in-way-of

כִּי אִם בְּתוֹרַת יְהוָה חֲפֹצוֹ וּבְתוֹרָתוֹ יִהְיֶה
he-meditates and-on-law-of-him delight-of-him Yahweh in-law-of rather but (2)

יּוֹמָם וּלְיָלֵלָה: וְהָיָה כְּעֵץ שְׁחוּל עַל־פְּלִי מַיִם
waters streams-of by being-planted like-tree and-he-is (3) and-night by-day

אֲשֶׁר פְּרִיו יִהְיֶה בְּעֵתוֹ וְעַלְהוֹ לֹא יִבּוֹל
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they-will-stand not this for (5) wind she-blows-away-him that like-the-chaff

רָשָׁעִים בַּמִּשְׁפָּט וְחַטָּאִים בְּעֵדָת צְדִיקִים: כִּי־
for (6) righteous-ones in-assembly-of or-sinners in-the-judgment wicked-ones

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תֵּאָבֵד:
she-will-perish

Chaff

“Much of the technology used in processing agricultural produce is known from biblical descriptions, archaeological discoveries, and artistic representations from different parts of the Near East. Threshing was done either by stick for small quantities of certain types of plants (cumin) or by a threshing sledge or a wheel-thresher. Winnowing took place during times when the threshed material could be thrown in the air by a fork (*mizreh*; Isa 30:24) or a wooden shovel (*rahat*; Isa 30:24) and **be separated to its components (grain, straw, chaff) by the wind according to weight.**”

Oded Borowski, “Agriculture,” ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 97.

“In Boaz’s winnowing (zārâ; Ruth 3:2), threshed material was lofted into the predictably moving air, which blew **the broken hulls and other pieces of chaff downwind** while the heavier grain fell nearby”

Robert W. Smith and Marvin R. Wilson, “Threshing & Winnowing,” *Dictionary of Daily Life in Biblical & Post-Biblical Antiquity* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2014–2016), 256.

Chaff

“**Chaff** evokes an image of lightness, **instability** and worthlessness. Scripture uses many harvest or agricultural images as figures of judgment: pruning, pulling weeds, threshing, picking, sorting sheep and goats, and **winnowing** (Mt 13:30; Lk 22:31).

“In winnowing, grain is threshed in order to separate the kernel of grain from the husk and straw. The mixture is thrown into the air with a winnowing fork or shovel. The wind blows the light husks away, the heavier straw falls near the edge of the threshing floor, and the grain falls back to the floor to be collected. Both the light husks and the heavier straw are referred to in the words translated “chaff” in the Bible.

“In Scripture chaff illustrates something that is **trivial, harmless and light**: “slingstones are like chaff” to leviathan (Job 41:28 NIV; cf. 13:25). Furthermore, chaff is something that is **ephemeral, dead and worthless** in **contrast to something that is stable, flourishing and alive**. The wicked are like chaff compared to the righteous, who are like a living, fruitful tree (Ps 1:3–4). Chaff is something that is easily driven away and discarded by the wind. Again, such are the wicked (Ps 35:5; cf. Job 21:18; Is 40:24; 41:15; Jer 13:24; Dan 2:25).

Leland Ryken et al., Dictionary of Biblical Imagery (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 136.

Plan of Study

1. Read Hebrew-English Interlinear (for word order and comments)
2. Read English translation laid out structurally 'close' to Hebrew flow
3. Scholarly quotes about aspects of the psalm
4. Further discussion of the psalm

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wicked-ones but-way-of righteous-ones way-of Yahweh watching-over

וְהָאִשָּׁה תִּאָּבֵד:
she-will-perish

Psalm 1 : Structure (1)

How blessed is the man who
 does not walk in the counsel of the wicked,
 Nor stand in the path of sinners,
 Nor sit in the seat of scoffers!

But his delight is in the law of the LORD,
And in His law he meditates day and night.

Psalm 1 : Structure (2)

And he 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 : Structure (3)

The wicked are not so, But they are like chaff which the wind drives away.
Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
Nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.

For the LORD knows the way of the righteous,
But the way of the wicked will perish.

Comments (A)

“[Psalm 1](#) introduces the whole book of Psalms. First, it is a psalm of faith ([3d](#)). This promise of prosperity is not a pledge of good fortune in return for good behaviour—the Psalms know life too well for that! (*see* [42](#), [73](#)). Rather, just as we continue to say ‘I believe in God the Father Almighty’ yet find that life often seems to deny both his fatherliness and his almightiness, so also v [3](#) professes a ‘creed’: this world is God’s world and those who side with him will surely and ultimately enjoy blessing ([6](#)). Secondly, it is a psalm of commitment: to a distinct lifestyle ([1](#)) and to the word of God ([2](#)). Indeed ‘distinctiveness’ is the theme around which the poem is structured.

A¹ (v [1](#)) The way of blessedness

 B¹ (v [2](#)) Continuance in the Lord’s law

 C¹ (v [3](#)) The enduring fruit tree

 C² (v [4](#)) The impermanent chaff

 B² (v [5](#)) No standing in the Lord’s judgment

A² (v [6](#)) The way of perishing

[NBC]

Comments (B – Joshua 1:8)

“This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success.

Comments (B – Shema, Deut 6:4ff)

*““Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! 5 “And you shall love the LORD your God
with all your heart and
with all your soul and
with all your might.*

*6 “And these words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart; 7 and you shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them
when you sit in your house and
when you walk by the way and
when you lie down and
when you rise up.*

8 “And you shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. 9 “And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Comments (B – Scoffer, Proverbs 22:10)

*Drive out the scoffer, and contention will go out,
Even strife and dishonor will cease.*

Comments (C – Lady Wisdom, Proverbs 1:20ff)

*Wisdom shouts in the street,
She lifts her voice in the square;*

*At the head of the noisy streets
she cries out;
At the entrance of the gates in the city,
she utters her sayings:*

*“How long,
O naive ones, will you love simplicity?
And scoffers delight themselves in scoffing,
And fools hate knowledge?*

Comments (D – EBCOT)

“The righteous man is positively identified by his association with "the law of the LORD." The "law" is not to be limited to the Five Books of Moses or even to the OT as a whole. The Hebrew word *torah* ("law") signifies primarily instruction that comes from God. This is the distinctive difference between revelation and religion (J. Ellul, *A Living Faith* tr. Peter Heinegg [San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983], pp. 111-25). Revelation comes from God for the purpose of helping man to live in harmony with God's will, whereas religion is man's attempt to order his path and to explain the world around him.”

Comments (E1 – EBCOT)

“Unlike trees growing wild in *wadis* or planted in the fields, where the amount of rainfall varies, the tree the psalmist envisions has been planted purposely by irrigation canals (*palge mayim* "streams of water"), artificial water-channels made for the purpose of irrigation (cf. Prov 21:1; Eccl 2:5-6; Isa 30:25).

“The imagery of the leaves and the fruit assure the godly that they will receive God's blessing and will enjoy life as a gift of God (cf. Ezek 47:12). True to the language used in wisdom literature, the godly are characterized by the success the Lord sends their way. The "prosperity" of the righteous does not necessarily extend to the assurance of great wealth but primarily to God's blessing on their words and works (cf. 90:14-17). “

Comments (E2 – EBCOT)

“The psalmist thus encourages the godly to pursue the way of wisdom. The wise man is characterized by success. **Nevertheless, the psalm does not encourage a success-oriented faith.** The godly do not seek success for its own sake, but they *do* receive a measure of blessing on their lives. The prosperity of the righteous--guaranteed or limited to the godly--is a gift of God, a by-product of wise living; cf. Joseph (Gen 39:2-3, 23), Joshua (1:8), Solomon (2 Chronicles 1:11-12), and Hezekiah (2 Chronicles 32:30). But success is **not** an infallible token of God's presence, **for the wicked may also prosper** (Ps 37:7). Rather, the righteous live with the *hope* of God's blessing.” [EBCOT]

Discussion

Psalm 1 *versus* the experience of Job?

Discussion

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The 80/20 spread of experience...

Discussion

Ask yourself:

How hard does a tree
“work” at being fruitful....?

Psalm 1

(continued)

The Psalms as Poetry

“The chief characteristic of Hebrew poetry in the Bible is balance or symmetry, commonly called parallelism. Biblical poetry is also marked by the use of repetition, a fondness for alphabetical acrostics, and the employment of metaphor and simile.”

“The Hebrew poets were inspired to take these spiritual insights and experiences and make them the themes of their songs. But it should be remembered that ‘the Psalms are poems, and poems intended to be sung, not doctrinal treatises, nor even sermons’ (C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*, 1958, p. 2)—hence the Hebrew title of the Psalms, *tehillîm*, ‘songs of praise’—also that they were giving expression to the religion of Israel to which the psalmists were heirs, not merely to their personal religious experiences. So the Psalms belong to all believers, Jew and Gentile.”

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Names / Translations of the Terms for God/gods

| Hebrew term | Elohim | Adonai | YHWH |
|---|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| English when used of God | God / GOD | Lord | LORD |
| English when used of humans or other gods | gods | lord(s) | (never used of anyone else) |
| Significance | Just a title of significant authority | Just a title of relative authority (e.g. 'master', 'sir') | A personal name, not a title, but names revealed something about character. |

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Standing in the Gate

Importance of the
Village Gate

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Comments (F – BKC)

“For all who take their delight in living by God’s Word, there is prosperity. Under the image of a fruitful **tree**, the psalmist declared that **whatever** the righteous do will prosper ([cf. 92:12-14](#)). Two qualifications need to be noted. First, the **fruit**, that is, the prosperity, is produced **in** its **season** and **not necessarily immediately after planting**. Second, what the godly person does will be controlled by the Law of God ([1:2](#)). So if a person meditates on God’s Word, his actions will be godly, and his God-controlled activities will prosper, that is, come to their divinely directed fulfillment.”

Discussion

Meditation and the Power of the Word itself

Comments (G1 – WBC)

“But a person who is to be happy must also engage in a positive task, which is identified in v 2 as being related to the Torah. Although the term *Torah* can be used of the law, or of the Pentateuch, or even (at a later date) of the whole OT, its significance here is the most fundamental one.

“Basically, the word *Torah* means “instruction”; specifically, it is the instruction which God gives to mankind as a guide for life. Thus it may include that which is technically law, but it also includes other more general parts of God’s revelation.

Comments (G2 – WBC)

“Torah is to be a source of “delight”, a delight which is discovered by means of constant meditation on its meaning. Just as the king would learn to live a life of humility and righteousness through constant reflection on the meaning of Torah ([Deut 17:18–20](#)), so too could all mankind. And an understanding of Torah contributed to long life, peace and prosperity ([Prov 3:1–2](#)), for in its words God has set down the nature of a life which would reach the true fulfillment for which it was created.”

Comments (H1 – WBC)

“The happy estate of the righteous is illuminated in v 3 by the simile of the tree. A tree may flourish or fade, depending upon its location and access to water. A tree transplanted from some dry spot (e.g. a wadi, where the water runs only sporadically in the rainy season) to a location beside an irrigation channel, where water never ceases to flow, would inevitably flourish. It would become a green and fruitful tree.

Comments (H2 – WBC)

“The simile not only illustrates colorfully the prosperity of the righteous, but also make a theological point. **The state of blessedness or happiness is not a *reward*; rather, it is the result of a particular type of life.** Just as a tree with a constant water supply *naturally* flourishes, so too the person who avoids evil and delights in Torah *naturally* prospers, for such a person is living within the guidelines set down by the Creator. Thus the **prosperity of the righteous reflects the wisdom of a life lived according to the plan** of the Giver of all life”.

Comments (I – WBC)

“The doom of the wicked, as it is expressed in this psalm, is **not primarily a punishment**, any more than the happiness of the righteous is a reward. Each is presented as the **natural outcome of a way of life which has been chosen.**”

Psalm 1 – from *The Message* version

- 1 How well God must like you—
 you don't hang out at Sin Saloon,
 you don't slink along Dead-End Road,
 you don't go to Smart-Mouth College.
- 2–3 Instead you thrill to GOD's Word,
 you chew on Scripture day and night.
 You're a tree replanted in Eden,
 bearing fresh fruit every month,
 Never dropping a leaf,
 always in blossom.
- 4–5 You're not at all like the wicked,
 who are mere wind-blown dust—
 Without defense in court,
 unfit company for innocent people.
- 6 GOD charts the road you take.
 The road they take is Skid Row.

Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language*
(Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2005), Ps 1:1–6.

Psalm 1