

## THE BOOK OF PSALMS

**Introduction to the Psalms:** *The book of Psalms is unique amongst the books of the Bible. It has a number of authors, chief of which was David. However, some psalms were written by Moses, some by Asaph, others by Ethan, and others. The word translated as **psalm** (מִזְמוֹר mizmowr) simply means ‘melody’ or ‘song.’ The Book of Psalms therefore was essentially the hymnal of Old Testament Israel. Some unknown editor evidently assembled what the Holy Spirit so indicated to him were the inspired Psalms. It would seem that at least one of the Psalms was written as late as the Babylonian captivity (Psalm 137). The editor likely was of the sons of Levi and more than likely one of the Temple musicians.*

*The Psalms are frequently prayers of David or of the other inspired contributors. Though more often than not connected with major events in the life of David, there are also many psalms which are prophetic in scope, pertaining particularly to the Messiah. Insight into why David was called a man after God’s heart is evident in the Psalms. There David revealed his love for God’s Word, his love for the Lord Himself, his utter trust in God, and his refuge in God. There are varying types of psalms. Notable are the ‘halel’ or praise psalms. There are*

*some imprecatory psalms wherein the psalmist cried out for justice and judgment against Israel's enemies. There are the psalms of degrees which were sung when ascending up to Jerusalem for feast days. Many of the psalms begin when David was in a valley of life and discouraged. Yet, as he began to focus on the mercies of the Lord, the psalm is transformed to one of praise and ends upon that mountaintop.*

*The Book of Psalms is also unique in that it is the largest book in the Bible with 150 chapters. It also contains the longest chapter in the Bible, Psalm 119, which is unique in itself.*

*The Psalms are in five books, each concluding with a doxology of praise: I. Psalms 1-41; II Psalms 42-72; III. Psalms 73-89, Psalms 90-106, Psalms 107-150.*

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**Overview of Psalm 1:** *As might be expected, Psalm 1 is the preface to the greater book. It succinctly and profoundly describes (1) the essence of a godly man and (2) the end of the ungodly. The profundity of this short psalm is exceeded only by its simplicity. Though not noted, the psalm in all likelihood was written by David.*

**1:1** The book of Psalms begins with the word *blessed*. **Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.** The word translated as **blessed** (אַשֶׁר 'asher) is also rendered as 'happy.' Indeed, happy is one who is blessed of God. The writer of Proverbs added further insight when he wrote, "The blessing of the LORD, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it" (Proverbs 10:22). God's blessing is nothing but good.

The psalmist therefore sets forth three conditions for God's blessing in this introductory verse. Of note is that these three

conditions are all negative. For each positive, there is always an equal and opposite negative. Thus the first condition is, “Blessed *is* the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly.” The wisdom of God is simple. Those who so order their lives in such a way that they do not walk in the counsel of the ungodly will be blessed (happy). The word translated as **counsel** (עֲצָה *etsah*) also has the idea of ‘advice’ or more broadly, ‘influence.’

The greater implication is that as God’s people separate from the counsel and influence of the ungodly, they will be blessed. God’s blessing in this regard is both passive and active. By simply separating from the influence of the ungodly, there is the indirect blessing of missing the corruption that is in the world through lust. Moreover, as one purposefully seeks to avoid the influence of the world upon his life, God very well may actively reach down and directly bless such an one. Of further interest is the thought inherent in the word **ungodly**. The word so translated (רָשָׁע *rasha`*) literally refers to the wicked. However, the Authorized Version rightly implies the lack of godliness in such an one. By implication, the thought is of not having close fellowship even with those who are essentially neutral to the things of God. They, to that degree, are ungodly.

Continuing, the psalmist wrote, (Blessed is the man that) “standeth (not) in the way of sinners.” The blessing of God further extends to those who do not stand in the pathway of sinners. (The word translated as **way** {דֶּרֶךְ *derek*} has the idea of a ‘roadway’ or ‘pathway.’) The greater thought is of not frequenting the places where sinners congregate. Again, the broader principle is that of separation. God’s blessing is promised for those who come out from among the world’s crowd and are separate therefrom. Notice also the progression of thought. The first condition of blessing involves not *walking* (fellowshipping) with the ungodly. Here, the idea is of not *standing* or being physically present with the world’s crowd.

Then, the final thought is (Blessed is the man that) “sitteth (not) in the seat of the scornful.” The thought likely is of not sitting under the influence of those who scorn the things of God. The application to education and where it is received is apparent. Notice also the continuing progression. God has promised to bless those who do not fellowship with the ungodly. That condition also includes separating from the places where sinners congregate. Finally, it includes not placing oneself under the influence and teaching of those who mock and scorn the things of God. A strong case for Christian education is thus at hand. Implicit is not being sympathetic to the influence of the world’s crowd.

The progression therefore is not fellowship with the ungodly (*mental influence*); not being present where such congregate (*physical presence*); and not being in sympathy with those who mock the things of God (*spiritual fellowship*). Notice how all three parts of our being are addressed: (1) body, (2) soul, and (3) spirit. The greater point is to separate from the world in every dimension. The essence of verse 1 therefore is to separate from the world.

**1:2** The conditions for God’s blessing continues. **But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.** Verse 2 is a continuation of the conditions for God’s blessing. Whereas the thought of verse 1 is to get *out* of the world, here the thought is to get *into* God’s Word. The man which God has promised to bless is one who delights in the law of the Lord. The word translated **delight** (חֵפֶזֶת *chephets*) is well translated. It also has the idea of ‘taking pleasure in.’ The blessing of God therefore is promised for those who take pleasure in and actually delight in the Law of the Lord. The Word of God is an acquired taste. The more we go to it, the more delightful it becomes. Though there are many things in life in which one might delight, God has promised blessing

for one who truly delights in His Word. Again, the blessing of God is both passive and active. As we go to the Word and delight therein, that in itself is a blessing and its influence is blessed. Moreover, God will actively and directly bless those who purposefully go to His Word on a regular, ongoing basis.

The psalmist takes the thought even further however. He speaks not only of delighting in the law of the Lord, but “in his law doth he meditate day and night.” David undoubtedly is hearkening back to the direct promise which God made to Joshua in Joshua 1:8. There, God directed Joshua to meditate “therein day and night.” There, God promised blessing for such and particularly for actually doing what is written therein. The word translated as **law** (תּוֹרָה *torah*) literally refers to the Law of Moses or the Pentateuch. And that was the operative Word of God which David had. However, by extension, the greater thought undoubtedly applies to all inspired Writ. The idea of meditating *day and night* at the least implies beginning the day in the Word and ending it in the same. The word translated **meditate** (הִגִּידָהּ *hagah*) literally alludes to thinking upon to the degree of uttering it under one’s breath. The greater idea is of thinking upon the Word of God throughout the day. However, one will never mediate upon the Word of God until, at the very least, there is reading of the Word. That seems to be implicit.

The word translated **day** (יוֹמָם *yowmam*) is not the more ordinary word for *day* (yom). The thought is of ‘by day.’ Thus, the thought here is to meditate *by day* and at night. The greater thought therefore is of exposure to the Word of God during the day and at night thinking thereon. Clearly implied is going to the Word of God more than once a day and doing so on a daily basis, seven days a week, 365 days a year. This second condition for God’s blessing is part and parcel with the first in verse 1. Together, they are (1) get out of the world and (2) get into the Word. God has thus promised His blessing for one who will so order his life.

**1:3** The blessings of God for so ordering our lives are thus enumerated. **And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.** There are at least four specific promises here.

One who will separate from the world and saturate his mind with the Word of God will (1) “be like a tree planted by the rivers of water.” Implicit in the analogy of a tree is *strength*. In the realm of botany, there is no greater plant than a tree. Furthermore, a tree which is planted has *stability*. When we separate from the world and saturate our minds with the Word of God, there will develop stability in our lives. Nothing significant is ever done by an unstable individual. Moreover, a tree planted by a river of water is a tree which will grow and be vibrant.

David lived in Israel which for the most part was semi-arid. Trees along the Jordan River were vibrant and lush whereas trees apart therefrom were often scrawny and struggling, if they existed at all. Trees growing along a river bank will almost always be vibrant and grow to their limit.

Then, (2) one who separates from the world and saturates his mind with the Word of God will be like a tree “that bringeth forth his fruit in his season.” Those who so order their lives before God will be fruitful even as a tree growing beside a river will bear fruit abundantly. Also noted is that the fruit will come in its season. That is, it will come at the proper time. God’s timing is always right. Our impatience for fruit at times runs ahead of God’s timing.

Then (3), one who separates from the world and saturates his mind with the Word of God will be like a tree whose “his leaf also shall not wither.” In the semi-arid hills of Judea, David undoubtedly had seen trees which through lack of moisture had their leaves wither prematurely. However, here the promise is made that those who will so separate themselves from the world

and immerse themselves in God's Word on a continual basis will not wither away spiritually.

Finally (4), such an one can claim the promise that "whatsoever he doeth shall prosper." The word translated as **shall prosper** (תִּלְכַּח *tsalach*) means not only to 'prosper' but to 'succeed' as well. The promise of Scripture is that as we (a) separate from the world and (b) saturate our minds with the Word of God on a daily basis, we therefore will succeed in whatever we do. The blessing of God will be upon whatever endeavor we are so involved. That is a profound promise. One reason why more people do not see the fulfillment thereof goes to the two conditions which precede it: complete separation from the world and saturation of our minds on a *daily* basis with the Word of God. The promise of God is that as we will so order our lives, He will cause *whatever* we do to prosper and succeed.

**1:4** The second division of this psalm is at hand. Whereas the first dealt with the conditions for God's blessings upon His people, here the focus turns to the ungodly and their situation. **The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away.**

Again, the **ungodly** (רָשָׁע *rasha'*) are noted. However, in contrast to the godly separated people of God who immerse themselves in God's Word, the ungodly do not have God's strength, stability, spiritual fruitfulness, or spiritual prospering upon their lives. Though the ungodly may make money and have the acclaim of the world, they often are hollow. There is not that stable, solid, spiritual depth in the issues of life. Accordingly, they are like *chaff*. The latter is the dusty husks of the grain left after it is threshed. It is unstable and usually blown away by the wind. The greater idea is of the contrast between the stability and fruitfulness of the godly versus the instability and worthlessness of ungodliness which is likened to chaff. Whereas the godly will bear valuable fruit in their lives, the ungodly