

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** (אֲשֶׁר 'esher) 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** (שִׂפְּחָה *shephets*) 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** (הגה *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** (יומם *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** (פָּרַח *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** (רשע *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 produce little of true worth and like chaff are driven by the winds of life.

1:5 Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. The focus of the psalm now looks forward to the day of judgment. In that day, the ungodly will not stand. The idea is that they will not prevail when they

stand before the bar of God's judgment at the Great White Throne Judgment. They will be cast into the lake of fire. The thought regarding "sinners in the congregation of the righteous" very well may refer to the millennial kingdom. Sinners will not be allowed to stand therein in that day. Or, in other words, sinners will not be allowed in that particularly Jewish phase of heaven. David wrote as a Hebrew primarily to Hebrews. The greater application is that sinners will not be allowed in heaven (apart from the saving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ). Thus, ungodliness produces not only instability and emptiness of life now, but also judgment and separation from the kingdom of God in the future. The folly thereof is thus apparent.

1:6 For the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish. God knows the way of the righteous. That is, God knows the path of those who live righteously and will reward them accordingly. See Psalm 58:12. By way of contrast, "the way of the ungodly shall perish." God will bless those who embody the principle of righteousness with all its implications. The ungodly will perish. What a profound contrast.

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***Overview of Psalm 2:** This second psalm is that of the Messiah as King. The psalm is thus messianic in its character. It looks forward to the day when Jesus Christ will return and establish Himself as King of this world. Though some have sought to apply this to David upon his throne, the context clearly is prophetic of the kingdom of God. The psalm has four apparent divisions: (1) 2:1-3 the*

nations rage; (2) 2:4-6 the Lord in heaven derides them; (3) 2:7-9 the Son proclaims the decree; and (4) 2:10-12 advice is given to kings to yield obedience to God's Anointed.

2:1 Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? Understanding of this psalm is best understood in looking forward to the millennial reign of Christ after His return in power and great glory. It clearly portrays Christ, the Messiah, upon His throne at the beginning of the Millennium, possibly at the end with the battle of Gog and Magog in view. (See Revelation 20:4-9.) The word translated as **heathen** (גוי *goy* or גוים *goyim* plural) is the common Hebrew word for 'gentile(s).' The perspective however likely is looking back at the concluding days of the Tribulation. The mood of the word translated as **rage** (רָגַשׁ *ragash*) is perfect and can allow for either present or past tense. The latter seems to fit the context. The idea therefore likely is unnamed persons, perhaps in heaven, musing about why the nations of the earth have raged through the Tribulation against God. Their folly is evident. The mention of the people imagining a "vain thing" may well be the thought of the world's forces prior to Armageddon, thinking they could resist the Messiah's return.

2:2-3 The perspective once again likely is from heaven as unnamed personalities there reflect upon the folly of earth's rebellion against their Creator and King. **The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying, 3 Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.** The thought likely is of the

rulers of the earth in that day as they contemplate rebelling against the impending return of Christ. Of interest is that the word translated as **anointed** (מָשִׁיחַ *mashiyach*) is also the Hebrew word for ‘Messiah.’ The time frame is not clear. It also may be in the days *immediately* after Jesus Christ has returned in power and glory and before the judgment of the nations in the valley of Jehoshaphat outside of Jerusalem and before the full establishment of His kingdom. See Joel 3:14 *ff.*

2:4 God’s reaction to the impotent rebellion of men and the world are thus recorded. **He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision.** The idea is of God laughing at rebellious man’s stupidity. God will hold them in utter derision as they think that they could resist His power. God clearly has a sense of humor and on occasion laughs.

2:5 Accordingly, **then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure.** God will swiftly deal with rebellious mankind. Isaiah 11:4, which is also a messianic prophecy about the return of Christ in power, notes, “and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked.” Some have viewed this as the events of the Tribulation. It may refer to the climatic events of Armageddon. However, the following context seems rather to indicate the days immediately after Christ’s return in glory. In any event, in that day, the wicked will be eliminated from the earth.

2:6 **Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.** Of interest is that the word translated as **set** (נָסַח *nacak*) can also have the sense to ‘anoint’ or ‘install.’ The

speaker clearly is He that sitteth in the heavens (verse 4). The word translated as **set** is in the perfect mood and can either present a completed or even future thought. Therefore, God announces that He either has or is immediately about to install His King upon His throne at Mount Zion. (The latter is a general synonym for Jerusalem.) Again, the time frame evidently is at the beginning of the Millennium.

2:7 The next section of the psalm thus commences. God had an announcement to make. **I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee.** The word translated as **decree** (צִוִּי *choq*) is most commonly rendered as ‘statute’ and can also have the sense of a ‘law’ or a ‘decree.’ His decree or formal announcement was “Thou *art* my Son; this day have I begotten thee.” Paul makes a direct application of this promise to the resurrection of Jesus Christ in Acts 13:33. Likewise, Romans 1:4 notes that Jesus was “declared *to be* the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.” See also Hebrews 1:5 and 5:5. Though Paul clearly applied this verse to the resurrection of Jesus, it likely has a broader application. The word translated as **begotten** (יָלַד *yalad*) in its most basic sense means to ‘beget.’ The application to Jesus being the only begotten Son of God and hence His incarnation quite apparently is in view as well. The decree seems to transcend the dimension of time. Jesus was God’s only begotten Son when He was born. He also was such when He was raised from the dead. He will be such when He is set upon His throne when He returns. He always has been and always will be God’s begotten Son.

2:8 Because of that unique relationship, God the Father therefore says to Him, **Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.** Though some have sought to apply this verse to missions and the Great Commission, the context clearly is of Christ and His coming kingdom. Once again, the word translated as **heathen** (גוי *goy* or גוים *goyim*) refers to the gentile nations. God has promised the nations of the earth to His only begotten Son as His inheritance. When He returns in power and great glory, He will then take possession thereof.

2:9 Moreover, God has promised to the Son that **Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.** The reference seems clearly to be the destruction of the political, cultural, economic, and military power of the nations when Jesus returns in power. There are four references in the Bible to a "rod of iron." Each of them relate to the millennial reign of Christ. See also Revelation 2:27, 12:5, 19:15. The implication is that during the millennial reign of Christ, sin will not be tolerated. It will be smashed like a pottery vessel as with a rod of iron in that day. However, the immediate application here is apparently of the return of Christ and how He smashes the power of the nations arrayed against Him at Armageddon. See Revelation 19:11-17, 14:14-20.

2:10 The final section of this psalm commences. It is advice to the remaining rulers of the earth in the day when Jesus Christ returns in power. **Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth.** God,

through His Word is offering sound advice for the rulers of the nations which are not destroyed when Christ returns.

2:11-12 Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little.

The nations of the earth in that day are counseled to serve the Lord with fear, rejoicing, and trembling. Though the context certainly is eschatological, the application surely applies from the day the psalmist penned it to this day. Kings in that day are counseled to thus worship the Son as King of the earth lest they face His wrath.

This profound psalm ends with the blessed promise: **12 Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.** This was true in that day. It is true today. It is eternally true. God will bless those who put their trust in Him. That begins with salvation. It continues on throughout the Christian experience. See also Psalm 34:8, 40:4, 84:12.