

The Book of Psalms

Psalm 1

Opening Prayer

Read Psalm 1

Overview

The placement of this psalm as the first in the book is deliberate because it really serves as introduction to the whole collection of psalms and their purpose, namely, that the righteous would prosper in their understanding of the Lord.

Psalm 1 is a wisdom psalm. Specifically it offers the wisdom of comparing the two ways: the way of the righteous and the way of the wicked. There are many other passages that do this in Scripture. *Compare Proverbs 2* and *Jeremiah 17:5-8*. The Jeremiah passage even parallels many of the same images by comparing a bush planted in the desert with a tree planted by the water. This comparison of the righteous and the wicked continues even into early Christian literature.¹

Like many of the Psalms, it is difficult to locate Psalm 1 into a historical time and place. Wisdom literature like it covers a great many eras and places.

Structure

The structure or pattern of the psalm could be summarized like this:

- :1-3 – description of the blessed righteous one
- :4-5 – description of the wicked
- :6 – final comparison of the two

Description of the blessed righteous one (:1-3)

- :1 - The word translated “blessed” here in verse 1 may also be translated as “happy”. This same word is given as the name of one of Jacob’s 12 sons, Asher. *Genesis 30:13*
- There is a progression in verse 1 for the one who ends up with the wicked. He starts with following(walking) in the counsel of the wicked. Then he “stands” in the way(mode) of sinners. Finally, he ends up sitting in the seat of the mockers.

¹ The Didache was an early Christian document written about 70 AD. It begins, “The teaching of the Lord to the Gentiles by the twelve apostles. There are two ways, one of life and one of death, and there is a great difference between these two ways.” The word Didache means “teaching”.

- This is the way sin ceases to be sin in our eyes. First, we are tempted to see things differently. Then we try it out and live it for a while, we stand in it. Finally, it becomes so much a part of our lives that we mock that it was ever considered sinful.

What are some sins that were at one time seen as sinful that aren't seen that way anymore?

How does our life with other Christians help stop this progression?

- :2 - The righteous takes “delight” or “joy” in the law of the Lord. The word “law” can be used a couple of different ways.

How the word “law” is used in Scripture

1. A specific command of God to His people
2. The whole of all the commands the God gives to His people
3. The whole of Scripture (Psalm 1’s use of the word)

- The word “gospel” is also used in a couple ways. When it appears with a small “g”, it refers to the message of salvation. For example, Paul’s use of “gospel” in **Romans 1:16**. When it appears with a capital “G”, it refers to one of the four Gospels in the New Testament.

- “And in His law he *meditates* day and night”

*What does it mean to “meditate”?*²

See Joshua 1:1-9(especially verse 8)

- :3 - Most English translations say something like “*firmly planted*”. What is really meant by the Hebrew is deliberately planted. The tree is placed by the stream or canal of water in a deliberate act.

What do you think is meant by it is deliberately planted by streams of water?

*What does this say about the tree’s ability to “choose” to be planted in that place on its own? So trees get to choose things like that? **Read John 1:12-13***

How does this passage speak to what makes us believers?

- :4 - “chaff” – The unwanted stuff brought in during the harvest. On the threshing floor one of the responsibilities was to throw the grain into the air. When this was done the wind blew the lighter chaff away while the heavier grain fell to the floor and was kept. The wicked will be threshed from that which is kept, the righteous.

² Luther: “To meditate is to think carefully, deeply, and diligently, and properly it means to muse in the heart. Hence to meditate is, as it were, to stir up in the inside, or to be moved in the innermost self.” (LW, vol 10, page 17)

- :5 - This verse is a deliberate reversal of verse 1. There the wicked chose to *stand* in the way of sinners and *sit* in the seat of mockers. Since they made those choices, they will not be allowed to *stand* in the judgment nor to *be* in the assembly of the righteous. Here the word assembly carries with it the notion of those who gather to sit and listen, as in a court or senate.
- :6 - This verse is the summary of all that the rest of the psalm said about the wicked and the righteous. It points out that the sifting or dividing between the wicked and the righteous is God's business because God knows. ***Read Matthew 25:31-46.***
- Who does the dividing in the Matthew passage?*
When do the events in Matthew take place?
How do we see that same time frame in Psalm 1?

Summary

Psalm 1 lays the groundwork for the rest of the psalms, but also for the rest of Scripture. As we read the Scriptures we are deliberately planted by the streams of water which grow our faith. They tie us to Him who loved us enough to give His life for us and will return again to renew all things.

Closing Prayer