

Psalm 1 - Only two ways to live

1. Brief intro to the Psalms
2. Observation and exposition of Psalm 1

Brief introduction to the Psalms (and Hebrew poetry)

1. I don't want to analyze these Psalms (label the types of imagery, the types of Psalms, the types of parallelism, explain Hebrew poetry in depth, etc.); rather, I want us to read them, think through them, feel them on an emotional level, internalize them, and own them.
2. "... the art and craft of the Bible's poems offers an invitation to read slowly, to have one's vision broadened, one's perception deepened....[and] to see literary reflection in the service of worship and godly living." *Introduction to the Poetic and Wisdom Literature*, ESV Study Bible, 866
3. "The practice of rendering the name of the Lord, Yahweh, by a title ("the Lord") keeps us from sensing the richness of Israel's religious experience and practice. The title lacks the emotive quality affected by the relationship between God and his people. The Lord had revealed his *name* (YHWH or Yahweh) to Israel. They knew not only that God has a name but also the pronunciation of the name: the four sacred letters -- *YHWH* (tetragrammaton). Though we are not sure of the precise pronunciation, we accept a common form of pronouncing them as *Yahweh*. This covenant name was holy (Exodus 20:7) but also precious. An example of the love of Yahweh is found in Psalm 7:17, where the psalmist, as on so many occasions, uses several references to his beloved God: "I will give thanks to the LORD [Yahweh] because of his righteousness and will sing praise to the name of the LORD [Yahweh] Most High [Elyon]." VanGemeren, 15

Observation and exposition of Psalm 1

1. **Psalm 1**
2. Two sources of values **(1-2)**
 - a. "Blessed is the man..."
 - i. A great way to start the first psalm, and the entire book of Psalms.
 - ii. "Blessedness is not deserved; it is a gift of God. God declares sinners to be righteous and freely grants them newness of life....Outside of God's blessing, man is 'cursed' and ultimately leads a meaningless life (Eccl 1:2)." VanGemeren, 53
 - iii. Blessed = truly happy
 1. "The word "happy" is a good rendition of 'blessed', provided one keeps in mind that the condition of 'bliss' is not merely a feeling. Even when the righteous do not feel happy, they are still considered 'blessed' from God's perspective. He bestows this gift

on them. Neither negative feelings nor adverse conditions can take his blessing away.” VanGemerén, 53

2. Compare **Matthew 5:3-11; James 1:12; 1 Peter 4:14**

- iv. God’s blessings extend to the whole person, both physical and spiritual, which is not always easy for us to see.
- b. While blessedness or happiness is a free gift from God, it must be cultivated by two kinds of activities: dissociation from the wicked and association with God (VanGemerén, 54)
 - i. walk - stand - sit = probably not a progression
 - 1. A classic example of Hebrew synonymous parallelism, showing the totality of evil in the lives of those who are not righteous
 - 2. Compare **Deuteronomy 6:7**
 - 3. In Scripture, “walk” is often used as a metaphor for how we live, and maybe more specifically, the choices we make in our daily lives.
 - a. See **Ephesians 4:1, 17; 5:1, 7-8, 15**
 - 4. “Way” is a common Biblical metaphor for “manner of life,” as summed up in **verse 6** of this psalm.
 - ii. If we are to “dissociate” from the wicked, how do we go about living in this world that is full of unbelievers, of whom we were before salvation?
 - 1. Along with that, in our modern world, we can be affected by more than just personal interaction with other people, especially pop culture (TV, radio, movies, the Internet, social media)
 - iii. “the law of the LORD (Yahweh)”
 - 1. “law” = *torah*, but this is not limited to the first five books of the OT (the Pentateuch), or even the OT as a whole. Rather, “the Hebrew word *torah* (“law”) signifies primarily instruction that comes from God.” VanGemerén, 54
 - 2. See the ESV footnote
 - 3. For Christians today, this is God’s instruction found throughout the Bible, both the Old and New Testaments.
 - 4. See **Psalms 19:7-11** or **Psalms 119**
 - iv. “delight”
 - 1. All that makes a person happy
 - 2. His chief desire
 - 3. To delight in the law of Yahweh is to delight in Yahweh himself
 - v. “meditates day and night”
 - 1. “Meditation is not the setting apart of a special time for personal devotions, whether morning or evening, but it is the reflection on the Word of God in the course of daily activities (**Joshua 1:8**). Regardless of the time of day or the context, the godly respond to life in accordance with God’s word. Even where the word is not

explicit, the godly person has trained his heart to speak and act with wisdom (**Proverbs 1:1-7**)." VanGemeran, 55

- c. The main difference between the righteous and the wicked? Delight in the law of Yahweh
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3. Two ways to live (**3-4**)
 - a. The righteous is like a tree planted by streams of water
 - i. Compare **Jeremiah 17:7-8**
 - ii. Compare trees on the North American prairie (Great Plains); Cottonwoods along streams, rivers, and ponds, for example
 - iii. "streams" here are actually irrigation canals
 - iv. "prosperity" does not necessarily mean great wealth, as in our culture, but "primarily to God's blessing on their words and works" VanGemeran, 56
 - b. The wicked are like chaff
 - i. "chaff" is the waste product of grain harvest
 4. Two outcomes (**5-6**)
 - a. The wicked/sinners will not stand in the judgment or in the congregation, but the righteous will.
 - b. "the LORD knows" = more than awareness or objective knowledge, though it is that as well.
 - i. "knows" here is the same word used in Genesis 4:1, speaking of the intimate relationship between Adam and Eve
 - ii. Some translations: "the LORD watches over"
 - iii. Compare with **Matthew 7:23**, where Jesus will say to the wicked, "I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness." This statement is in a section of the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus is comparing and contrasting two ways to live, using three different images (**7:15-27**).

Resources

1. *ESV Study Bible*
2. *Psalms, The Expositor's Bible Commentary (Volume 5)*, Willem A. VanGemeran
3. *Psalms: An Expositional Commentary, Volume 1*, James Montgomery Boice