

*THE  
BOOK  
OF  
PSALMS*

## **Introduction to the Book of Psalms (or the Psalter)**

The Book of Psalms was divided into five books:

Book I	Psalms 1 – 41
Book II	Psalms 42 – 72
Book III	Psalms 73 – 89
Book IV	Psalms 90 – 106
Book V	Psalms 107 -150

**History and Date:** The Psalter is a collection of collections and is the result of a process that spanned several centuries. Temple personnel put the Psalter into final form after the exile in Babylon and completed their work probably in the third century B.C. The literature of Psalms is poetry from beginning to end.

**Authorship:** Several authors are named in the Psalter including David, the Sons of Korah, Asaph, and Solomon. While these may be actual authors of many of the Psalms, some Psalms may be written by others but credited to one of these authors. Also, many Psalms give no hint of the author.

**Theology:** Since the Psalter is comprised of 150 different individual Psalms, it is not feasible to identify specific theological doctrines developed throughout the Book. However, the following quotations from the NASB Study Bible describe a general theological emphasis throughout the Book.

At the core of the theology of the Psalter is the conviction that the gravitational center of life, of history, and of the whole creation is God. He is the Great King over all, the One to whom all things are subject. He created all things and preserves them; they are the robe of glory with which he has clothed Himself . . . . He will come to rule the nations so that all will be compelled to acknowledge Him. This expectation is no doubt the root and broadest scope of the psalmists' long view of the future. Because the Lord is the Great King beyond all challenge, His righteous and peaceable kingdom will come, overwhelming all opposition and purging the creation of all rebellion against His rule – such will be the ultimate outcome of history.

When the Psalms speak of the king(s) on David's throne they speak of the historical king. But, clearly these references are to be understood to declare what God will accomplish through His true Anointed One – The Messiah. The New Testament quotes the Psalms as testimonies to Christ . . . . In Him they are truly fulfilled.

# Main Types of Psalms

“The Psalter is primarily a book of prayer and praise.” (NASB Study Bible)

- 1) Prayers of the individual – i.e. Psalm 3:7-8
- 2) Praise from the individual for God’s saving help – i.e. Psalms 30 and 34
- 3) Prayers of the community – i.e. Psalms 12 and 44
- 4) Praise from the community for God’s saving help – i.e. Psalms 66 and 75
- 5) Confessions of confidence in the Lord – i.e. Psalms 11 and 16
- 6) Hymns in praise of God’s majesty and virtues – i.e. Psalms 8 and 19
- 7) Hymns celebrating God’s universal reign – i.e. Psalms 47 and 93 – 99
- 8) Songs of Zion, the city of God – i.e. Psalms 84 and 122
- 9) Royal Psalms – by, for, or concerning the King, the Lord’s anointed – i.e. Psalms 2 and 18
- 10) Pilgrimage songs – i.e. Psalms 120 – 134
- 11) Liturgical songs – i.e. Psalms 15 and 68
- 12) Didactic or teaching songs – i.e. Psalms 1 and 37

## Forms of Speech in the Prayers of the Psalms

- 1) Address to God: “O Lord”      “My God”
- 2) Initial appeal: “Arise”      “Help”
- 3) Description of distress: “The wicked attack”
- 4) Complaint against God: “Why have you forsaken me?”
- 5) Petition: “Be not far from me”
- 6) Motivation for God to hear: “For your name’s sake”
- 7) Accusation against the adversary: “There is not truth in their mouths”
- 8) Call for redress: “Let them be put to shame”
- 9) Claims of innocence: “They hate me without cause”
- 10) Confessions of sin: “I have sinned against you”
- 11) Professions of trust: “Your are a shield about me”
- 12) Vows to praise for deliverance: “My lips will praise you”
- 13) Calls to praise: “Sing praise to the Lord”
- 14) Motivations for praise: “For you have delivered me”

# Psalm 1

- 1 Blessed *is* the man  
Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly,  
Nor stands in the path of sinners,  
Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;
- 2 But his delight *is* in the law of the LORD,  
And in His law he meditates day and night.
- 3 He shall be like a tree  
Planted by the rivers of water,  
That brings forth its fruit in its season,  
Whose leaf also shall not wither;  
And whatever he does shall prosper.
- 4 The ungodly *are* not so,  
But *are* like the chaff which the wind drives away.
- 5 Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment,  
Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.
- 6 For the LORD knows the way of the righteous,  
But the way of the ungodly shall perish.

## **Overview of Psalm 1**

Psalm 1 and Psalm 2 introduce the Book of Psalms.

- No title.
- David is author.

Theme of Psalm 1: The definite difference between the righteous person and the unrepentant sinner.

Three General Topics:

1. The Blessings of the Righteous
2. The Characteristics of the Righteous
3. The Contrast Between the Righteous and the Ungodly

# The Blessings of the Righteous

The word “Blessed” in verse 1 is plural in the Hebrew. One commentator suggests we think of it as the “blessednesses” of the righteous person. Although verse 1 refers only to “the man”, verse 6 makes it clear that the subject is the “righteous” man or person. So, verse 1 points us to the blessings the righteous person enjoys. Verses 1-3 and 6 describes these blessings and the characteristics of a righteous person.

The Psalm is not a prescription for how to become righteous.

- Noah – Genesis 7:1; Hebrews 11:7
- Abraham – Genesis 12:1-5, 15:1-6; Hebrews 11:8

## Blessings

- 1) Delight is in the law.
- 2) In His law he meditates.
- 3) Planted like a tree. (Not like a wildly scattered seed, rather owned, part of a farmer’s orchard)
  - a) By rivers.
  - b) Brings forth fruit in season.
  - c) Leaves do not dry up; never a time when not fruitful.
- 4) Whatever he does prospers.
  - a) Materially
  - b) Spiritually
- 5) The Lord knows the way of the righteous.
  - a) Spurgeon – “The Lord is *knowing* the way of the righteous.”

# Characteristics of the Righteous

The writer of the psalm describes the characteristics of the righteous person by contrasting what he does not do (v.1) with what he does do (vv.2-3).

Walks not in counsel of ungodly ----- Delight is in law of Lord

Nor stands in path of sinners ----- In His law meditates

Nor sits in seat of scornful ----- Like a tree planted

Walks not in the counsel of the ungodly: The *ungodly* are the careless, unbelieving, unresponsive to God, and unconcerned about the Word of God and spiritual things. Advice about living based on human philosophy and experience. Rooted in a false perception of the source of all things and of human ability. Denies the truth of God's Word. Rejects the absolute nature of the Law of God. Rejects the need for faith, repentance, and salvation. Not merely advice, but also goals, practices, habits.

Delights in the law of the Lord: Spurgeon – “He is not under the law as a curse and condemnation, but he is *in* it, and he delights to be in it as his rule of life.” His soul is filled with the comfort of the truth of the Law and all of God's Word. The absolute nature of the Law gives him security and shines the holiness of the character of God into his mind and heart. He rejoices in the direction for living God gives in His Word. He is exhilarated by knowing he hears the voice of God instead of the opinion or ideas of men.

## Characteristics of the Righteous (continued)

Nor stands in the path (way) of sinners: Although we are all sinners, here the psalmist refers to “sinners” as “the active, habitual doers of iniquity” (Perowne). The righteous person does not seek to be identified with sinners and does not practice their sinful habits. They are not his best friends and companions. Other people will not identify him with sinners. Throughout Scripture there is a distinct, clear, identifiable difference between the people of God and sinners.

In His Law he meditates day and night: Spurgeon – “He is not *under* the law as a curse and condemnation, but he is *in* it, and he delights to be in it as his rule of life.” A picture of being immersed in the Word of God. Thinks about how God’s law and the whole of God’s Word applies to his life. Applies his mind and heart to understanding more and more about God, the inexhaustible Source of wonder, knowledge, discovery, and surprise. Able to learn to find greater and greater peace and joy in the wonders of creation; in the infinite knowledge and genius of God; in the love, grace, and mercy of God; in the promises of forgiveness and everlasting life with God, and in the solid foundation of God’s providence in all things.

Nor sits in the seat of the scornful: The *scornful* are those claim a place or “seat” of knowledge and wisdom for themselves who openly mock and curse God and the things of God and teach others to do so. The righteous person will not take that seat, that place. It does not belong him. His seat is the seat of those who bless God, offer thanksgiving and praise to God, tell others the truth of God, and teach others to do so.

He shall be like a tree planted: Jeremiah 17:7-8. Unlike the scornful who claims his *seat*, the righteous person “Planted like a tree”. Spurgeon – “Not a wild tree, but “ a tree planted,” chosen considered property, cultivated and secured from the last terrible uprooting.”  
Matthew 15:13

## Characteristics of the Righteous (continued)

### He shall be like a tree

Planted by the rivers of water: Not a pool or pond that could dry up or just one river, but rivers. An endless supply of the source of life and refreshing. Revelation 22:1-2.

That brings forth its fruit in its season: Patience in trials, perseverance in persecution or suffering, rejoicing in success, comfort in grief, rest during stress, peace in times of fear and conflict, hope in times of failure.

Whose leaf also shall not wither: Never a time when he will not be fruitful. His leaves do not dry up, always green, always supply the tree with effects of sun to produce fruit, always providing shade and nesting places.

And whatever he does shall prosper: Primarily “soul prosperity” (Spurgeon) rather than material prosperity.

- Ephesians 1:3; new birth, new heart/desires, faith in Christ, credited with righteousness of Christ, forgiveness, everlasting life, peace with God, indwelling Holy Spirit, loved by God,, the mind of Christ

## Characteristics of the Righteous (continued)

And whatever he does shall prosper (Cont.):

- However, in context includes material blessings.
  - Deuteronomy 28; Matthew 6:31-33; Psalm 37:25, Mark 10:29-30
  
- But not an assurance of perpetual earthly success.
  - Philippians 4:12; 1:29; 3:8; Hebrews 10:32-34
  
- How are we to understand this prosperity?
  - Certainly true that God will meet the earthly needs of His people in order for them to fulfill His purposes for them.
  - Also true that God uses trials and sufferings to make us holy, increase our faith, develop character, and teach us perseverance. All these things prosper our souls.
  - All that the righteous person does in striving to obey God prospers the work of the Kingdom of God in the world.

# Contrast Between the Righteous and the Ungodly

“The ungodly are not so.” In the *Vulgate* and *Septuagint*, the phrase is forcefully translated, “Not so the ungodly, not so.”

## Ungodly

like the chaff

which the wind drives away

shall not stand in the judgment

nor in congregation of the righteous  
Ezekiel 13:9

## Righteous person

like a tree planted

not uprooted in final judgment

member of the “church of the  
firstborn” Hebrews 12:22-24

The ungodly will not stand to defend themselves, for they will have no defense. They will stand to be judged. Philippians 2:9-11.

There is no place in heaven for sinners. Here on earth, the church is always mixed. Spurgeon – “Every church has one devil in it!” But, in heaven and in the restored creation, there will be no ungodly, no sinners, no scornful.

## Conclusion

For the Lord knows the way of the righteous.

- ✧ Psalm 37:18-19; 31:7; Job 23:10; Matthew 10:29-30; 2 Timothy 2:19; 2 Peter 2:9
- ✧ God watches over His people with tender love and care. He possesses all power to lead them in the “paths of righteousness” and bring them into everlasting glory with Him.

But the way of the ungodly shall perish.

- ✧ Psalm 37:20; Isaiah 60:12; Jude 14-15, Revelation 20:14
- ✧ Note that verse 1 the righteous person does not stand in the *path* of sinners. In some translations the Hebrew word is translated *way*. So, the psalmist emphasizes that the righteous man does not “in the way of sinners” and here in verse 6 tells us that the “way of the ungodly shall perish.” So, he describes the characteristic of the righteous and also gives a warning.