



Bible Study
Biblical Theology of Psalms
Lesson 1: Psalms

INTRODUCTION

This lesson starts a new study of the Psalms. This study is a biblical theology of the Psalms, intended to trace the Messianic hope Psalm by Psalm.

The book of Psalms is a collection of 150 Psalms. Psalms are biblical poetry. We can divide biblical content into three main content genres: narrative, poetry, and prose. Narrative, or story, is the largest content type and accounts for 43%, nearly half, of the Bible. Narrative refers to the form of the content as a story. It could be history, like 1 and 2 Samuel. It could be biography, like Ruth and Esther. It could be parables, like in the Gospels. Poetry makes up about one-third (33%) of the biblical content. Poetry is typically lyrical as in the book of Psalms, or it can refer to wisdom writing, like Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. The remaining content of the Bible, about 24%, is prose. Prose is usually writing or speaking that is not poetry. In the biblical content, it refers to written content such as a lecture, like the Sermon on the Mount, an essay, like Hebrews, or a letter, like Romans.

Poetry has to do with the form of expression, and we might say the beauty of the form of expression. Poetry is distinct from an instructional lecture or narrative story in terms of form of expression, but it still speaks to human experience. Biblical poetry is still Scripture, and so it is also authoritative.

Poetry uses accessible figures and images. It usually has layers of meaning within a compact form of expression. The beauty of the expression is reflective of the intricate structure beneath the surface of the poetry. Poetry structures feature acrostics, chiasm, number schemes, etc. Poetry is aesthetically artistic, but not for pleasing effect only. Poetry is one form of expression employed by biblical writers to communicate truth.

Biblical poetry employs various devices, such as imagery, metaphor, simile, figures of speech, hyperbole, personification, paradox, parallelism with comparison and contrast. Hebrew poetry doesn't rely on rhyme and meter like English poetry we are used to. It rather uses rhythm and structure and repetition.

This lesson considers Psalm 1.

Summary Statement:

Psalm 1 shows the way of life through delighting in and meditating on God's word.

OBSERVATION

The author and date of writing for the first Psalm are unknown. Some think it was written by David because Psalm 1 and 2 are a fitting, complementary pair placed at the beginning of the Psalms and function as an introduction to the whole collection. Neither of the first two Psalms have a superscription, but Psalm 2 is attributed to David in Acts 4:24.

In fact, the Psalms are divided into five collections, or books. Book 1 contains Psalms 1-41. All of those psalms are attributed to David, except for Psalms 1, 2, and 10. None of those three have a superscription. It's not possible to be certain of the writer.

Psalm 1 is the first part of the introduction to the entire collection of Psalms. The short first Psalm touches on big themes, such as contrasting the righteous and the ungodly, and it focuses on the word of God. It is sometimes referred to as a wisdom Psalm because it contrasts two ways, much like the contrasting of wisdom and folly in Proverbs. In Psalm 1 and in Proverbs, one way leads to blessing and life, while the other way leads to cursing and death. Adherence, or not, to God's word determines the way one is on and the outcome of that way (Proverbs 1:7, 20-33).

Walk Through Psalm 1

Verse 1 begins with a beatitude, exhorting readers to emulate the blessed man. He is presented in this verse as what he is not. He is not walking, standing, or sitting in the counsel, way, or seat of the ungodly, sinners or scornful.

Verse 2 contrasts the negative qualities in the first verse. The blessed, happy man is delighting and continually meditating in Yahweh's law. The word for *law* means instruction and is used in reference to the ten commandments, the law of the covenant in the Mosaic books, and is also used to refer generally to all of God's word.

Verse 3 uses a simile to compare the blessed man to a well-watered, fruitful tree. This is the outcome, or result, of delight and continual meditation on God's word.

Verse 4 uses a simile of worthless chaff, which is blown away by the wind. The life of the ungodly is here contrasted with the previous picture, as the ungodly life comes to nothing.

Verse 5 describes God's judgment to be like the wind that blows the chaff away. The ungodly cannot stand, or remain, but will be taken away by that judgment.

Verse 6 ends the Psalm by pointing to the contrasting ends of the two ways. The righteous are known by Yahweh and have life. The way of the ungodly ends in death.

Outline

1. Two Ways (1-2)
2. Two Fruits (3-4)
3. Two Ends (5-6)

INTERPRETATION

God's Word

Psalm 1 teaches that God's word is crucial and central to life. It is the delight and meditation of the blessed man who is sustained, fruitful, and lives. The word for *meditate* means to murmur or mutter. It can be used negatively or positively. It refers to speaking in low tones. Historically, reading was out loud, though in a low, muttering tone if reading to oneself. It's not clear when silent reading became common, but it is generally agreed it was after the first few centuries AD and it arose in the West. The word was used figuratively to mean ponder, and so, *meditate*, gives the sense of the word. The Psalm teaches we cannot come to life, be fruitful, sustained, or even be in the right way by neglecting and ignoring God's word.

The Ungodly

Considering verses 1 and 2 together, the counsel of the ungodly, the way of sinners, and the seat of the scornful is shown to be what is contrary to God's word (Proverbs 1:7, 22-25, 29-30). Through refusal of God's word, the ungodly become like chaff that is blown away by the wind. Chaff is contrasted with a strong, fruitful tree. Nothing produced by the ungodly has any lasting value.

Being driven away like chaff is reflected in the outcome of judgment. The judgment implicated is future judgment by God. Their remembrance will be wiped out or wiped away (Exodus 17:14; Proverbs 10:7). Bildad spoke similarly of the fate of the wicked in Job 18:5-21, especially verse 17. The ungodly will not be found among the assembly of the righteous.

The Righteous

On the other hand, the righteous are not wiped out, but are known by God. The righteous stand, or survive the judgment because they are delivered from it. Their blessedness and life beyond the judgment are attributed to the knowledge and grace of God, not their own righteousness (Job 23:10; Psalm 37:18-24; 139:1; 142:3; John 10:14, 27; 2 Timothy 2:19).

The Messianic Hope

The main theme in the Psalms as a whole is the hope of the Davidic Messiah and his kingdom. The promises of the Davidic Covenant are the firm foundation of that hope.

When we consider the first Psalm in terms of the nation of Israel, we realize this Psalm echoes the instruction they received before entering the promised land (Deuteronomy 6:1-9). The words of Yahweh were to be in them and with them continually. They were to speak of them at all times and bind it upon their persons and houses. The word to Joshua as Moses' successor echoed these instructions as well (Joshua 1:8). This exhortation continued to echo to Israel through the ministry of the prophets, as spoken by Jeremiah to Judah (Jeremiah 17:5-8).

Israel was repeatedly warned to keep God's word and not forsake it for ungodly counsel. Rather than being planted, they were plucked up out of the land because they refused God's

word (Jeremiah 29:19-23; 32:23). Rather than being a planted and fruitful tree, they were driven off the land like the chaff blown away by the wind (Deuteronomy 4:27; 28:64; Jeremiah 9:16; 13:24; 18:17).

Their restoration will come, their blessedness, and their salvation will come when this is reversed by God's law being written in their hearts and they will continually delight and meditate on his word (Jeremiah 31:33-34). Then they will be planted and fruitful in the land promised to Abraham (2 Samuel 7:10; Isaiah 60:21; 61:3; Jeremiah 32:42). The prayer and hope for Israel to have God's word in their hearts and be planted, fruitful trees is for the coming of the Davidic King (Ezekiel 34:22-31), who is perfect in keeping God's law (Deuteronomy 17:14-20).

APPLICATION

What does Psalm 1 say to modern readers?

1. Psalm 1 exhorts us to be immersed in God's word. This includes reading, studying, meditating, memorizing, and speaking God's word.
2. Psalm 1 warns us of the counsel and way that is contrary to God's word. We must be aware of any thoughts or ideas leading away from God's word.
3. Psalm 1 assures us of coming to life through God's grace. There is no fruit or stability through neglecting his word.

ABOUT THIS STUDY

This series is a study in biblical theology of the book of Psalms. Each lesson typically covers one Psalm. This PDF is provided for personal study, small group study, or use in a church class. Unless otherwise noted, all lessons have been prepared by Jeff Short, the pastor of Harmony Baptist Church.

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