

1. **INTRODUCTION:** Psalm 1 falls into the category of Psalms that focus the faithful's attention upon God's as revealed in the Old Testament. The Psalm is a worshipful praise for God's revealed Truth in Scripture, through which we can confidently engage Him and come to know Him intimately. Psalm 1 is written anonymously, and focuses on God's Blessing being reserved for those who both love and follow God.
 - a. The first psalm is a wonderful introduction to the Psalter with its pronouncement of blessing on all who respond in fidelity to the God who has revealed His covenant with His people Israel.
 - b. The placing of this psalm as the first in the Book of Worship [Psalms] is significant because it both invites and encourages God's people to live faithful and godly lives. Moreover, it encourages us that this is what God expects from His people. It also provides the assurance that the righteous will be rewarded because in the end God "knows the way of the righteous."
 - c. The first Psalm effectively sets the tone for the entire Psalter because of its stated primary concerns that are then repeated throughout the Psalms and Scripture in general:
 - i. First and foremost, a believer's primary life focus is to know, love, and honor God with our lives. This affirms the "Shema" of the Old Covenant – "Hear O Israel, that the Lord our God is One. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your might." (Deuteronomy 6:4-5; CR Mark 12:29-31)
 - ii. Second, God's people are known for their Godly [righteous] living.
 - iii. Third, that the hope of God's people is in the realization of the promises of God's covenant revealed in Scripture.
 - d. Psalm 1 is often presented as a "Wisdom Psalm," because it shares many features in common with the book of Proverbs, as well as to other such Psalms like 19; 34; 37; 49; 73; 111-112; 119; 127-28; 133.
 - e. Psalm 1 proclaims the blessedness of Godliness, and it encourages wisdom as the proper focus of the individual's values and world view, which should play out in their entire way of life.
2. **TIME OF WRITING AND AUTHOR:**
 - a. Although positioned at the beginning of the psalter, the time of writing is not necessarily associated. Scholars range the composition from the earliest date at the time of David and Solomon, to the latest dates of the exilic period. Due to its close association with the Proverbs and Psalms 19 & 119, a time of writing in David's and Solomon's monarchy, seems most reasonable. It is thought that the sequence of the order of psalms could have been finalized during the exile, and of course we received the Old Covenant compositions as a wonderful gift from God's people Israel.
 - b. The author is not noted in Scripture, and is unknown. Though associated with Davidic psalms, it lacks David's writing character. Though more closely associated with the proverbs, Solomon is known to have written many, and to have edited older writings to reflect Hebrew theology.

- c. Extra-Biblical cast no further light on the author, and it is largely accepted that the time of writing and author are not knowable with the present information we have. As archaeological and scholarly discoveries of previously uncatalogued materials as well as new discoveries of archaeological sites are constantly revealing new information that may in time cast new light on this debate. For now, it is best not to force conclusions that the evidence does not support.

3. STRUCTURE:

- a. Exegetic Outline – Psalm 1 has three distinct sections in its brief six verses:
 - i. The Way of the Godly – 1-2
 - ii. The Future of the Godly and the Wicked Contrasted – 3-5
 - iii. The Way of God – 6
- b. Thematic Outline – Psalm 1 may be seen in the movement of positive and negative in the context of outcome in a parallel structure.
 - A. “Blessed is the man” – Vs 1... **the Positive identity to be desired**
 - B. [One] “who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers.” [Instead] Their delight is in the law of the LORD, and on His law he meditates day and night. – Vs 2 **the substance of a blessed identity**
 - C. “He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither, and whatever he does prospers.” – Vs 3 **provides the expected outcome**
 - A’ “Not so the wicked!” – Vs 4a... **the negative identity to be avoided**
 - B’ **Unwritten, but understood to be the opposite of ‘Blessed’**
 - C’ “They [wicked] are like chaff [a useless by product] that the wind blows away.” Therefore, the wicked will not stand [as justified] in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.” – Vs 4b-5 **the substance of a wicked identity**
 - A* “For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.” – Vs 6 **is the summary outcome**

4. BIBLICAL EXEGESIS AND THEOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT:

- a. Vs 1 – is a negative example of what you don’t want to be as a child of God. It is cleverly written to present what is blessed by not doing what is wrong. Here the author sets the standard of conduct by drawing a contrast of what a believer does not want to emulate – meaning being one known as the “wicked, a sinner, and the mocker” [or scoffer].
 - i. Wicked – meaning one who delights in doing what is in opposition to God’s commands for His people. Zondervan’s New International Bible Dictionary translates the Hebrew word “*rasha*” and the Greek words “*poneros*” and “*poneria*” as “evil,” especially in the NT. The idea being presented is that of a

person or thing that is 'bad, worthless, depraved, and corrupt,' and especially of a person or thing that opposes God, His will, His Messiah, and His gospel. It can describe a whole people or an individual or the state in which they are (as seen by God)."

- ii. **Sinner** – meaning one who's appetites are in opposition to God's standards. Zondervan's New International Bible Dictionary in the OT usage, sees "sin" as human character depravity in the context of the "Perfect Living Lord, who is utterly pure and holy. For sin is that condition and activity of human beings that is offensive to God, their Creator. However, it is only as they are conscious of his holiness that they are truly aware of their sin (1 Kings 17:18; Ps 51:4-6; Isa 6)." Sin in this context is not merely "wrong doing" but more specifically "wrong being."
 - 1. "The reality of sin and the need for atonement to be made (and confession of it offered to God) are clearly presupposed by the sacrifices offered to God in the temple—e.g., the regular guilt (or trespass) offering and sin offering, as well as the special annual sacrifice of the Day of Atonement (Lev 4; 6:24 ff.; 7:1 ff.; 16:1 ff.)."
 - 2. "The NT strengthens the OT portrayal of sin by viewing it in the light of Jesus and His Atonement, which is a victory over sin. Jesus was sinless and taught that the root of sin is in the human heart: "For from within, out of men's hearts, come...evils" (Mark 7:20-23). The outward life is determined by the inner life (Matt 7:15-17), and thus an outward conformity to laws and rules is not in itself a true righteousness if the heart is impure (5:17 ff.)."
 - 3. The law of God, rightly understood, requires inner as well as outer conformity to its standards. But sin is more than failure to keep the law: it is also the rejection of God and His Messiah and the kingdom He proclaims and personifies."
- iii. **Mocker or scoffer** – meaning one who both ridicules or is scornful of the advice and correction of others, preferring to act in whatever manner they please in defiance of God and appropriate conduct. The result is a person whose world and values rotate around their own self-interest and situational ethics.
- iv. This "trifecta of wrongness" describes an individual that is:
 - 1. Consumed by their animal passions and self interests.
 - 2. In utter contempt of the concerns or interests of others.
 - 3. Defiant of God and His standards, and rejects His reproof or convictions brought through His Word and the faith community.
- b. Vs 2 – is a positive example of what you want to be as a child of God. Here the standard is identified with the dependence upon the Word of God, whereby God's people are instructed and living in harmony with God and each other.

- i. **“Delighting in the Law”** indicates that they are not only obedient to the Law by learning, studying, memorizing, and living out God’s Word; they enjoy this process and in doing God’s will – Psalm 112:1; Deuteronomy 10:12.
- ii. This delight in the Law is not merely obedience to a requirement imposed upon them by God, but rather it is a state of bliss knowing they are pleasing to God by doing God’s will on earth – Matthew 6:10.
- iii. Psalm 1 should be understood as an invitation to open one’s heart and mind and develop Godly discipline as a desire in their life, it is definitely not a demand to legalism or self-righteousness. Knowing God and being obedient to His invitation for “instruction” should be seen along the lines of Proverbs 22:5-6 which captures the Psalmist’s intent – “In the paths of the wicked lie thorns and snares, but he who guards his soul stays far from them. Train a child in the way they should go, and when they are old they will not turn from it.” Zondervan’s Expository Commentary explains:
 - 1. Proverbs 22:5 is an appeal to gain personal security through wisdom – “those who have the discipline of wisdom avoid life's dangers. The ‘wicked’ [who refuse a parent’s Godly discipline] are on a dangerous path, covered with ‘thorns and snares.’” In contrast, the wise and prudent guard their lives and avoid the trap of sin as a way of life.
 - 2. Proverbs 22:6 is about Child training – the proper training of children will endure throughout their lives. The second clause here provides the result of the first. The imperative to "train," includes the idea of to "dedicate," meaning the training should be done with a thoughtful long-term purpose. The NEB [Bible version] captures the point of early instruction: "Start a boy on the right road," i.e., "in the way he should go."
 - 3. The conclusion of this line of reasoning is that there is a standard of life to which all of humanity should adhere. The promise of learning this standard young is that when they are old, they will not depart from it.
 - 4. In Proverbs there are only two "ways" a child can go – the way of the wise and the righteous, or the way of the fool and the wicked.
- c. Vs 3 – The righteous “are like a tree planted by streams of water.” The meaning here is that the righteous are grounded [in Truth], they take root in good nourishing soil [a disciplined life lived well], and well-watered in a world that is often arid and dangerously inconsistent [where they are secure and blessed].
 - i. The result of this is being “fruitful” – interpreted as living meaningful lives of purpose and consequence, which is blessed because it is pleasing to God. The example of King David as “a man after God’s own heart” (1 Samuel 13:14), comes to mind in this context. Not that David was a perfect man because he clearly

- wasn't, but his character generally demonstrated his desire to be with God and honor God with his life.
- ii. "Prosper" here is not necessarily monetarily, as many often teach in the so-called "Prosperity Gospel." Zondervan's Expository Commentary interprets this as – "The prosperity of the righteous is God's blessing on their words and works." Prosperity is found in the Person of God, which is wealth beyond human understanding or measure; Gold by comparison is a poor blessing (cf. Psalms 90:14-17). "The psalmist thus encourages the godly to pursue the way of wisdom. The prosperity of the righteous is reserved for the godly... it is a gift of God, a by-product of wise living."
- d. Vs 4 – The wicked have nothing that is fruitful in contrast with the righteous.
- i. Their empty lives are as worthless as chaff... the useless by product of harvesting and threshing grain.
 - ii. Threshing involved walking the upon the stalks to separate the grain from stalks and then throwing them up into the air so the breeze would blow away the chaff from the grain. The fruitful grain would fall back upon the threshing floor where it was collected, while the chaff would be blown away and was of no consequence.
- e. Vs 5 – Not being able to "stand" means they have no foundation, nothing to ground them and support them. Davidic Psalms often refer to God as the "Rock" – a sure and firm foundation that can be relied upon. God's Word is the believer's standard of life and conduct, and the means of knowing and pleasing God. With no knowledge of the Word, the wicked are lost and separated from God.
- i. The righteous are well grounded and have a solid foundation. This solid foundation provides the basis for their being well nourished, growing old and becoming fruitful.
 - ii. This contrast is what the psalmist has in mind when he speaks of being happy and prosperous.
 - iii. The psalmist understands that life isn't inherently fair, because it is apparent that many of the righteous suffer, and many of the wicked seem to prosper; but it is understood that "true prosperity" consists in peace with God. This "Shalom" is seen as the righteous entering into God's Shalom [rest].
 - iv. Zondervan's Expository Commentary offers this perspective – "The end of the wicked may not be clear while they are alive, but from God's perspective they have no future. They cannot withstand the judgment of God. They are judged by being alienated from the congregation of the righteous (i.e. those who have a relationship with God and enjoy his presence), both now and in the life to come."
- f. Vs 6 – is the summary conclusion of the psalm. "The reason for the certainty of the judgment lies in God's knowledge of the affairs of humankind. God's knowledge offers the certainty of a deep commitment by God to love and care of His own; hence the

translation 'the LORD watches over.' The Lord offers no protection to those who are not reconciled to him; rather, their end is destruction."¹

5. OLD COVENANT THEMES AS THEY PLAY OUT IN THE NEW COVENANT:

- a. God's Word is the authoritative standard for training and discipleship... 2 Timothy 3:16 – "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness." Scripture as God's self-revelation to humanity, is the only authoritative standard to experience God and be transformed by Him... Romans 12:2 – "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is; his good, pleasing and perfect will."
- b. God's provision for Training the Community of Faith and Discipling the Church – Ephesians 4:16 – "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work."
- c. The faithful and the faithless will live together in the community, but God understands who are His people and who are not; and each will be held accountable for the choices they make... Matthew 7:21-23 – "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers [those who practice wickedness]!"
- d. The spiritually mature have a God given responsibility to raise their children purposefully that they might live Godly lives... Ephesians 6:4 – "Fathers [and mothers], do not exasperate [provoke] your children [to anger]; instead, bring them up [nurture them] in the training and instruction [the chastening and admonition] of the Lord."

¹ Zondervan's Expository Commentary, Scholar's Edition Interactive Bible Software