

THE PSALMS

BOOK THE FIRST

PSALM 1

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

The Righteous Man and the Lawless Contrasted.

ANALYSIS

The Righteous man Described—vers. 1-3: by what he Does Not—ver. 1; by what he Does—ver 2; and by what he is Like—ver. 3. The Lawless man described, as a Contrast, and by what he is Like—ver. 4; also by his Doom, negatively expressed—ver. 5. Jehovah's relation to the Two Ways—ver. 6.

(Nm.)

- 1 How happy¹ the man—
Who hath not walked in the counsel of the lawless,²
and in the way of sinners hath not stood,
and in the seat of scoffers hath not sat,³

1. Note that the Psalms open with a word of emotion. See Intro., Chap. III., "How happy."

2. "Cp. Isa. 13:11, 14:5. The use of *r-sh'* in allusion to Israelites implies disloyal association with the heathen, the impious outsiders (Ps. 25:5). The term is opposed to 'the righteous'; cp. Exod. 9:27, Hab. 1:4, 13, Prov. 3:33, 28:1-4, 12, 28, 29:2 (also cp. *hoi anomoi* in Macc. 2:24, 3:5, 6)"—Thirtle, O.T.P. 106.

3. Note tenses. "The perfects in ver. 1 describe what he all along has never done"—Del.

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- 2 But rather in the law¹ of Jehovah is his delight,
and in his law doth he talk with himself² day and night.
3 So doth he become like a tree planted³ beside channels of
waters,
that yieldeth its fruit in its season,
whose leaf also doth not wither,—
And whatsoever he doeth he causeth to prosper.⁴
4 Not so the lawless!
but rather as chaff which the wind driveth away.
5 For this cause shall the lawless not rise in the vindication,⁵
nor sinners enter into the congregation of the righteous.⁶
6 For Jehovah does acknowledge⁷ the way of the righteous,
but the way of the lawless shall vanish.⁸

(Nm.)

PARAPHRASE

PSALM 1

Oh, the joys of those who do not follow evil men's advice.
who do not hang around with sinners, scoffing at the things of
God:

2 But they delight in doing everything God wants them to,
and day and night are always meditating on His laws and
thinking about ways to follow Him more closely.

3 They are like trees along a river bank bearing luscious
fruit each season without fail. Their leaves shall never wither,
and all they do shall prosper.

4 But for sinners, what a different story! They blow away
like chaff before the wind!

5 They are not safe on Judgment Day; they shall not stand
among the godly.

6 For the Lord watches over all the plans and paths of
godly men, but the paths of the godless lead to doom.

1. Or: "instruction." Cp. 19:7-14, 119 *passim*.

2. Heb. *hagah*; synonymous w. *siach*, "soliloquise." Note throughout.

3. So Dr., Per., Del., Carter, Leaser; but "transplanted"—O.G., Br.

4. Ver. evidently expanded in Jer. 17:8.

5. "That is, in the resurrection which takes place in the judgment, at
the end of the age of the world"—Br. Cp. Isa. 26:14, 19, Lk. 14:14, 1
Cor. 15.

6. Cp. 111:1.

7. Ml.: "know"; but sometimes, "know w. approval," "recognise,"
"acknowledge." Cp. 37:18, Mt. 7:23, Rom. 8:29, 2 Tim. 2:19.

8. Ml.: "perish"; but when a *way* perishes, it "disappears"; leading
to nowhere, it is "lost," is no longer a "way." Cp. 112:10.

PSALM ONE EXPOSITION

This Psalm is a commendation of the godly life. It opens with an expression of admiration for the man who lives that life: which it proceeds to describe in a simple and engaging manner, by telling us what such a man avoids—what he delights in—and what he resembles. He avoids the downward course by not beginning it; he delights in *Jehovah's law*, and shows his pleasure in it by diligent study; and he thereby resembles *a tree planted* in a spot where it is well-watered. Each of these points is enlarged sufficiently to make it impressive. The man described avoids three things: he *walks not in the counsel of the lawless*—that is, he does not take the advice of those who care not how they live; he *stands not in the way of sinners*—in other words, he declines bad men as his companions; and he *sits not in the seat of scoffers*—he refuses to form one of a circle who spend their time and wit in ridiculing religion. The things to be avoided are thus presented in the form of a double climax: worse and worse companions, and more and more submission to their influence. The unprincipled may prepare you for the immoral, and the immoral for the contemptuous: you may take bad advice, then seek bad company, and at last scoff at all goodness. *Happy the man* who does none of these things! Thrice happy he who *has not begun to do them!*

But life cannot thrive on negations. He that would hate wickedness must love goodness. Now, as *the law*, or instruction, of *Jehovah*, the holy and loving God, affords guidance to a good and holy life, it follows that he who would shun evil will take so much pleasure in divine guidance that he will look out for it, learn it, linger over it. The laws of nature he will revere and observe; the laws of revelation he will welcome and obey. If he is so happy as to know Christ, he will find in him the spirit and sum of all law (1 Cor. 9:21). Christ will be the law of his being. As The Christ rejoiced that *Jehovah's "law of righteousness was enshrined in his deepest affections"* (40:8), so will Christ's follower make it his greatest joy to do his Master's will. The newspaper, the novel, will be less highly esteemed than the Bible. He may be compelled, or find it serviceable, to consult the first; he may be able to choose and utilise the second; but it is to the third that his mind will gravitate, from the third that he will store his memory, in the third that he will

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discover his songs of immortal hope; and though—not being an Oriental—he may not be heard literally *soliloquising* out of the Holy Scriptures, yet will he count every day lost in which he does not gain clearer insight into its wisdom, and will feel every wakeful night-hour soothed which lights up any of its great and precious promises.

His best life, thus thrives. He is like a well-planted *tree*—*transplanted* that it might be well-planted. He comes directly under the care of the Divine Husbandman, whose well-planned and well-watched irrigation keeps him constantly supplied with the *waters* of life through the *channels* of appropriate means conducive of spiritual growth and fruitfulness. *Seasonable fruit* is the glory of fruit-bearing trees: learning and liveliness in youth, steady work and sturdy endurance in middle life, patience and serene hope in old age as the better-land draws near—these are the fruits to be looked for in the garden of Jehovah. Everything is beautiful in its season (Ec. 3:11): yea, even the *leaf* that does *not wither*: the ornamental as well as the useful has place, and the ornamental conceals and shields the useful, as the *leaf* does the *fruit*; and so even beauty is not to be despised—especially that of modesty; even the leaf that hides the fruit may help its growth. But, as a man is better than a sheep (Mt. 12:12), so also is a man better than a “tree”: no tree being fit adequately to symbolise a “man, made in the image of God” (Jas. 3:9). Therefore the psalmist, returning from the man-like tree to the tree-like man, and leaving the tree behind, as unable to bear the weight of such a clause as *whatsoever he doeth*, says of the man with his multifarious capacities, of the man under Divine culture, who soliloquises day and night in the law of Jehovah,—*And whatsoever he doeth prospereth*; and so it does, sooner or later: if not during “the night when Weeping has come to lodge,” then “in the morning when Jubilation” appears (30:5): then shall we be made “glad according to the years Jehovah had humbled us—the years we had seen misfortune”; and discover that, after all, “the work of our hands had been established upon us” (90:15).

Not so the lawless: very much “not so”! Surprise, therefore, need not be felt that the Septuagint *repeats* the negative, both for feeling and for filling out the line: “Not so the ungodly, not so”; even though it must be confessed that the half line in

PSALM ONE

Hebrew is still more effective, and more symmetrically answers to the half-line at the commencement of the psalm. *But rather as chaff which the wind driveth away*—as of no worth and no further account. *For this cause shall the lawless not rise in the vindication*; and, from the Old Testament, scarcely could we learn that they will rise at all: certainly not *in the vindication*, a well-sustained rendering, which anticipates the distinction made by our Lord when he spake of “the resurrection of the righteous” (Lk. 14:14). *Sinners shall not enter the congregation of the righteous*: whose way, life, character will NOT *vanish*, but continue evermore. *For Jehovah doth acknowledge*—know, approve, perpetuate—*the way of the righteous*; but *the way of the lawless shall vanish*—like a track lost in the waste, where no footsteps can make a path. “Only the way of the righteous is *derek olam* (“a way age-abiding”) (139:24), a way that issues in eternal life”—Del.

This psalm and the next are anonymous, and without any superscribed or subscribed lines. They are admirably adapted for the purpose they were manifestly intended to serve: namely, as introductory to the whole Book of Psalms—the former penned from a purely ethical point of view, and the latter from a national, Davidic, and Messianic standpoint. One or both of these psalms may have been placed here by Ezra; but each may have been first brought into use as introductory to a smaller and earlier collection. Though probably placed here by Ezra, this first psalm was almost certainly composed by Hezekiah, whose spirit it breathes—as may be seen by a comparison if it with the latter half of Ps. 19 and the whole of Ps. 119,—a conclusion confirmed by the fact that it was expanded by Jeremiah (17:8) and therefore must have already been in existence.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. By considering this whole Psalm give three reasons the godly are blessed or happy and three reasons the ungodly are not.
2. How can all men be thus divided?
3. Discuss the progression and culmination of sin.
4. Could Biblical examples be found and discussed which exemplify the three stages of ungodliness?
5. How shall we cultivate the capacity to “delight” in the law of God?

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6. What is involved in the act of meditating?
7. In what way is the godly man like a tree?
8. No fruit—or little fruit and withered leaves is an indication of a lack—what is it?
9. Many ungodly men prosper—how shall we account for this?
10. Since we are all sinners what comfort is there in God's knowledge of our ways?

PSALM 2

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

The Messiah's Reign in Zion Assured.

ANALYSIS

Stanza I., vers. 1-3, A Conspiracy against Jehovah and His Anointed Foretold. Stanza II., vers. 4-6, Jehovah's Counter Proclamation. Stanza III., vers. 7-9, The Messiah's Claim to the Throne. Stanza IV., vers. 10-12, Counsels of Peace.

(Nm.)

- 1 Wherefore have nations consented together?¹
or should peoples keep muttering an empty thing?
- 2 The kings of earth take their stand,
and grave men have sat in conclave together,²
against Jehovah and against his Anointed One:—
- 3 "Let us tear apart their bands,
and cast away from us their cords!"³
- 4 One enthroned in the heavens will laugh,
my Sovereign Lord will mock at them;
- 5 Then will he speak to them in his anger,
in in his wrath will dismay them:—

1. "So most probably from meaning of Heb. stem and context; 'rage'—A.V., R.V., J.P.S.V.,—'rage furiously'—P.B.V., 'tumultuously assemble'—R.V., Kirk., and so variously, most moderns, are not sustained by text or context"—Br.

2. "It is general rebellion against Jahve and His Anointed"—Del.

3. "They are, therefore, at the time of their rebellion subjects of Jahve and His Anointed"—Del.