

## Lesson 4

# Psalms 1 and 150: Import of First and Last Psalms

Psalm 1 is an appropriate preface, preamble, or introduction to the entire book of Psalms in that it sets forth the way to blessedness (or happiness), contrasting it with the way of unrighteousness. These are two themes which recur numerous times in the remainder of the psalms. This psalm is general and basic, foundational for understanding the remainder of the psalms, perhaps the rest of the Bible. Two fundamental ways of life are contrasted, one black, one white.

In this psalm is revealed the blessedness of righteousness and the misery, desperation, and ill future of the wicked. In this regard it emphasizes the importance of God's presence in our lives. God's message, the Scriptures, is presented as crucial to man's well-being.

One commentator has written, "Psalm 1 constitutes a preemptive strike with regard to much that will follow in the Psalter. Prayers issuing from the

experience of attack, shame, fear, isolation, divine abandonment, and divine anger will dominate the first half of the Psalter. These prayers could give the impression that such experiences are characteristic of the life of the godly. The Psalter begins by affirming that this is not so."

It should be observed that what this psalm depicts

is not necessarily what appears to be the reality of present circumstances. Rather, it is the depiction of the ultimate outcome of choosing either the way of righteousness or the way of the wicked. Many of the psalms that follow will express how life for the righteous "feels" in the present. But, we must be called back to the message that introduces the psalms—the message of the ultimate end of these two approaches to life.

### Jeremiah 17:5-8

Compare this text with Psalm 1. Are they just similar, or suggestive of the psalm's earlier origin?

### The Blessedness of the Righteous Man—vv. 1-3

Notice how this short psalm begins with a conditional beatitude. The blessing (beatitude) ascribed is promised to the man who behaves in a particular way. This is also the manner in which Jesus opened His famous Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7).

"Blessed" is an exclamatory word, conveying the idea of "O the blessedness of" whatever subject is addressed. It actually is a plural that could be translated "the blessednesses."

This concept of blessedness is somewhat hard to adequately define. Modern commentators often equate it with "happiness," which is useful if not complete in defining the concept. Perhaps it is best to acknowledge that God, in all His plans, laws, and actions works toward man's well-being. That broad state of spiritual and physical well-being, when attained, makes for a use-

### Psalm 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;  
But his delight is in the law of the LORD,  
And in His law he meditates day and night.  
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.  
The ungodly are not so,  
But are like the chaff which the wind drives  
away.  
Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the  
judgment,  
Nor sinners in the congregation of the  
righteous.  
For the LORD knows the way of the righteous,  
But the way of the ungodly shall perish.

ful, fruitful, joyful, contented, and happy existence. It is a blessed life. It is the life that all men seek, but only the righteous actually achieve.

The righteous man's character is first described *negatively* by three degrees of habit and conduct. He does not:

- **Walk** (go along, follow) the counsel of the ungodly
- **Stand** (stop, be firm) in the path of sinners (cf. Prov. 4:14-15)
- **Sit** (dwell, remain, abide) in the seat of the scornful (cf. Ps. 26:4-5)

Here we find an example of *progressive parallelism*, showing that he is not guilty of any of three progressive errors. He doesn't "walk" with the careless and ungodly who forget God. Neither does he "stand" openly and defiantly with purposeful sinners. And, he won't "sit" in the seat of the scornful, becoming a teacher of such evils and scolding or ridiculing truth.

An important truth is thrust upon us in this psalm. People can't remain passive or indifferent toward God and His word. Such passivity leads to progressively greater and greater sin.

Next, the man who will be blessed is described in a *positive* manner. He does:

- "Delight" in the law of the Lord, not seeing God's directives as some sort of curse to be borne, but as a useful rule for his life. Such a delight causes this man to be preoccupied with God's will for his life (cf. Pss. 40:8; 119:47-48).
- "Meditate" upon God's law day and night. Thus, his meditation is consistent and persistent. The study of God's word is not an occasional endeavor for this

## Prepare to Discuss

Look up the meaning of the word *meditate*. Be ready to discuss how we accomplish meditation today.

man, but rather his work "day and night" (cf. Ps. 119:15-16, 97-99 and Josh. 1:7-8).

Finally, this man's prosperity is described. He is like a tree planted by rivers of water, deeply rooted, fruitful in its season. As a sign of his vitality, like the leaves of a well watered tree, his leaves do not wither. Whatever this man undertakes to do will prosper.

Notice that this isn't a wild tree, but one purposefully "planted" and cultivated. Compare this to the New Testament exhortation to fathers to bring their children up in the "training and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4).

## The Desperate Situation of the Wicked Man—vv. 4-5

The ungodly man has nothing in common with the righteous. All that was said about the behavior and prosperity of the righteous is exactly the opposite of the wicked man.

The righteous man is compared, metaphorically, to a rooted, watered, flourishing "tree" while the wicked man is compared, metaphorically, to "chaff," which the wind blows away. Such have no root or fruit. As such, they present themselves as worthless and unstable.

These ungodly men are unable to do two important things:

1. They cannot stand (or withstand) in the day of judgment.

2. They cannot stand in the congregation or assembly of the righteous. (In New Testament thought, the Lord adds to the church [assembly] those who are saved. He does not add the wicked to that number. [See Acts 2:41, 47.])

## Final Contrast of the Two Ways—v. 6

On the one hand, the Lord "knows" the way of the righteous. This certainly speaks of more than God simply being aware of these folks and their behavior. He knows them in a much more intimate and active sense. He watches over and protects them. Salvation in the day of judgment is equated with being known. In Matthew 7:23 it is recorded that Jesus said, "And then I will declare to them, 'I never *knew* you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness.'" In 2 Timothy 2:19 we read, "The Lord knows those who are His." Compare also Nahum 1:7.

Since the ungodly are not known by God, the psalm ends by declaring they will "perish."

## Present Day Application

The introductory psalm of this great book of psalms teaches a fundamental lesson still critically needed today. God is the source of all that is good. All blessings flow from Him. And the means of access to these blessings of God is His word—the Holy Scriptures.

## Word study

"Wicked" is a key word in the psalms. It will recur often, so research what this word means for class discussion.

"Ungodly" is another key word, whose meaning needs to be explored.

The greatest need of mankind is not health or financial security or even a general happiness. It is to know the ways of God and, in turn, to be known by God.

This world is so full of misery, degradation, and failure because the overwhelming majority of people are biblically illiterate, unaware, and little interested in God's revelation.

Psalm 1 serves not only as a fine introduction to the book of psalms but to the entire Bible. It could be an excellent place to start a discussion of God's word with unbelievers.

As Psalm 1 introduces and sets the tone for the whole book of Psalms, so Psalm 150 serves as a superb conclusion to all that is contained in the book. The Psalter begins with "Blessed is the man"

and ends with "Praise the Lord." Like Psalm 1, this final psalm has no title or author suggested.

The final psalm qualifies as a final and climactic doxology, an ultimate hymn of praise and worship of God, the logical and obvious reaction of all who learn the lessons conveyed in the great book of psalms. Ten times comes the exhortation to "Praise Him!" Franz Delitzsch suggests "ten is the number of rounding off, completeness, exclusiveness, and of the extreme exhaustableness."

It must be remembered that the psalm is written within the context of Old Testament worship, where instrumental music was, as we see here, authorized and commanded by God. Students of the New Testament Scriptures will observe that no direction or authority for such is given there, only the command to "sing" (Eph. 5:18-19; Col. 3:16).

Likewise, dancing was a part of the worship of ancient Israel, but is nowhere commanded or exemplified in the New Testament. And, it is worth observing that all the examples of dancing in the Old Testament, given approval, were of males and females dancing separately and not in some sort of lustful man-

## Research

See what you can find about the instruments mentioned. They may be different than our modern ones.

- Trumpet (cornet, horn)
- Lute (psaltery)
- Harp
- Timbrel
- Stringed instruments
- Flutes (pipes)
- Cymbals

ner. (See the celebratory dance of Miriam and the women after the Red Sea crossing, Exod. 15:20; and David's dance "before the Lord," 2 Sam. 6:14.)

The underlying message of this psalm is that praising God should be central in a man's life. If it is, the blessedness and prosperity ascribed to the righteous who delight in the instruction of God, in Psalm 1, will be realized.

## Compare Psalms 146, 147, 148 and 149

While Psalm 150 caps the psaltery with praise, it should be noted that the preceding four psalms do likewise. Read through them and compare the praise presented. As a group they are sometimes referred to as the "Hallelujah Psalms."

## Learning More about Worship

Many seek to compartmentalize their lives, making separate cubbyholes for their spiritual and temporal lives. Psalm 150 refutes this approach to life, urging us to praise God in every way, in every venue and with the totality of our lives.

We noted in an earlier lesson that each of the five sections of the book of Psalms concludes with a short hymn of praise, and

## Psalm 150

Praise the LORD!  
Praise God in His sanctuary;  
Praise Him in His mighty firmament!  
Praise Him for His mighty acts;  
Praise Him according to His excellent greatness!  
Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet;  
Praise Him with the lute and harp!  
Praise Him with the timbrel and dance;  
Praise Him with stringed instruments and flutes!  
Praise Him with loud cymbals;  
Praise Him with clashing cymbals!  
Let everything that has breath praise the LORD.  
Praise the LORD!

so it is not surprising that the entire psalm book composition is concluded with an emotional poetic call to praise God in every manner. The world needs to hear of His mighty character, of His greatness and desire to bless those who will listen to Him.

**Following the direction of Psalm 150, put a total effort into this effort of worship and praise.**

ward the idea set forth in Psalm 150.

**Class Activity**

Choose one or more of the following hymns to sing in class, or a comparable song of praise of your choosing.

- “Alleluia”
- “Hallelujah! Praise Jehovah!”
- “Praise the Lord”
- “Worthy Art Thou”
- “Praise Him! Praise Him!”

Notice that Psalm 150 not only calls upon readers to worship God, it also tells us something of the nature of worship. We are not to worship merely by mental contemplation of God’s greatness. We are to engage our minds, voices, bodies and hearts in that worship. The final summation of the psalm is a call for

universal praise of God with all the means and might available in man.

This final psalm is rapturous in its form, overflowing in its enthusiastic expression of praise.

A great number of the most popular songs and hymns sung in Christian worship today carry for-

**Homework and Questions**

*Be sure to do your homework because what you discover will become part of our study and discussion during class.*

1. Discussed earlier was the negative progression of habit or conduct. We observed the progression from *walk* to *stand* to *sit* in Psalm 1. Look at those verses again to see if you observe any other progressions in the words.

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Degrees of openness, fellowship, or involvement, seen in words: *counsel—path—seat* \_\_\_\_\_

Degrees of evil resulting, seen in the words: *wicked—sinners—scoffers* \_\_\_\_\_

2. What do you learn from Psalm 1 about the company you keep? \_\_\_\_\_

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3. Explain your understanding of the metaphor in Psalm 1:3, where a righteous man is compared to a tree. Particularly, how is a man who delights in and meditates upon God’s word like a healthy, well-watered tree?

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4. Taking the concept in 1:3 that “whatever” the righteous man does will prosper, and comparing that to New Testament passages, like Ephesians 1:3, 3:20; and Philippians 4:19, write down what you think is meant by the word “whatever.” Is this promising a problem-free life? \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
5. What characterizes a scoffer? Give some examples. \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
6. Give your own explanation of what Psalm 1:6 means when it says “For the LORD *knows* the way of the righteous.” \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
7. In what manner, or by what means, will a sinner “perish”? \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
8. Do you see anything in Psalm 150 that addresses the false notion that God can be worshipped out in the fishing boat or hiking through the woods through mere admiration of His creation? \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
9. Psalm 150 calls for God to be praised in His “sanctuary.” In your estimation, where or what is God’s sanctuary? \_\_\_\_\_
- The tabernacle or temple in Israel
  - Heaven
  - The church or individual members of the kingdom, who are the “temple” of God
  - All of these
  - Other
10. Make a list of six (6) attributes of God. Now, try to create a very simple psalm of six lines that speak of those attributes. (Remember, you don’t have to rhyme any words.)
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**Look at Parallelism, etc.**

Does the parallelism of the first two lines help in determining the nature of the sanctuary?

Praise God in His *sanctuary*;

Praise Him in His mighty *firmament*!

Or, does the reference to musical instruments suggest something different?