

Psalm 1 – Weekly Preparation Guide¹

Introduction to Psalm One

The Psalms were written over an approximately 900 year span and their final and completed assembly was by one of God's faithful men. In this final structuring of the book as a complete collection, this Psalm, Psalm 1, was intentionally placed first. Do not let this fact be lost on its present title as "Psalm 1" as its placement elsewhere in the book would have given it another numerical designation. This Psalm being placed first in the collection/book was as intentional as the placement of the last Psalm, Psalm 150, which itself serves as a final and culminating doxological Psalm for the entire collection (note here that each of the five books within the Psalms closes with a doxology and the final book closes with a series of them and culminates with this final Psalm). So, it is the clear and consistent conclusion of faithful men that Psalm 1 was intentionally placed first in the Psalms and that as such it serves as a foundational Psalm for all that will follow. Keil and Delitzsch's commentary on the Psalms identify Psalm 1 as the prologue for the Psalms² and Charles Spurgeon identified Psalm 1 as the official introduction to the Book of Psalms stating, "This Psalm may be regarded as The Preface Psalm, having in it a notification of the contents of the entire Book."³

Now, as the prologue or introduction to the Psalms, what foundation is Psalm 1 establishing? It is establishing that the LORD's man is righteous, the LORD's man delights in the LORD's law, the LORD's man meditates on the law, and the LORD's man prospers from his satisfaction and disciplined giving of himself to the LORD. Psalm 1 is giving us a picture of a man who knows and is known by his God, and it demonstrates that this is a man primed for worship and prayer, which are the intended achievements of the Psalms.

A distinct way that this Psalm makes its case is the consistent use of contrast and comparison, particularly the righteous (which are inferred, but not directly referred to as such until the last verse) and the wicked who, appear to be synonymously referenced as sinners and scoffers in the first verse and then back to wicked for the duration of the treatment. In summarizing Psalm 1, Keil and Delitzsch's title it, "The Radically Distinct Lot of the Pious and the Ungodly."⁴ Now, after giving time in study and meditation, how might you title this short, but extraordinary foundation for the book?

Structure Aids

The general structure of Psalm 1 appears to be: negative contrast with a digression of reference (1:1), the formal contrast with affirmative qualities (1:2), then a botanical illustration affirming the positive qualities (1:3), a contrasting botanical illustration that is diminishing the negative contrast (1:4), an explanation of the negative botanical illustration (1:5), and a final contrast of affirming and diminishing (1:6).

Now, as Hebrew Poetry we can expect to see more formal structuring to the Psalm. I say this as one who is not an expert on Hebrew Poetry to faithful men and women who are also not experts on Hebrew Poetry. Allow this information to provide a measure of insight, but not at the expense of becoming frustrated over a discipline that takes substantial time to learn and even longer to functionally master.

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² C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch; Keil & Delitzsch: Commentary on the Old Testament, Volume 5 – Psalms. Hendrickson Publishers, 2001. (Hereafter: Keil & Delitzsch), Pg.47

³ Charles Spurgeon; The Treasury of David, Volume 1 – Psalms 1-57. Hendrickson Publishers. (Hereafter: Spurgeon), Pg.1

⁴ Keil & Delitzsch, Pg.47

This is my attempt to identify and lay out the structure of Psalm 1 in what is called a Chiasm or a structured literary work with various degrees of parallel lines that often have a central point that they are driving at in the middle. With my attempt at understanding this, I see layered parallels that are pointing to the illustrative comparison of the righteous and the wicked (what appears to be the heart of the Psalm).

First Comparison: Blessed Man does not with wicked (three pictures with wicked, sinners, and scoffers)

Qualities of Blessed Man

Botanical Comparison: Picture of Righteous/Blessed and Picture of the Wicked

Lacked Qualities of the Wicked (two pictures with wicked and sinners)

Final Comparison

For a more skilled understanding of the structure of this Psalm I would direct you to David A. Dorsey who is an expert in this area and identifies Psalm 1 as having a Four-Part Symmetry.

"Four-part symmetries are common in the Psalter. This structural scheme allows the psalmist to underscore, by matched repetition a and a' and in units b and b', particular themes and points. The positions of emphasis in this configuration are generally the opening and closing units."⁵

Using this structural understanding Dorsey states that Psalm 1 draws a comparison between the righteous and the wicked - with an emphasis on their respective fates.⁶ Effectively the same conclusion that I also came to and that you also likely came to without even necessarily understanding this more technical discipline. However, while we can often come to the correct conclusion without having the measure of grammatical/structural insight as someone like Dorsey, we always need to respect that the Lord uses grammar and structure, and understanding its rules and functions are helpful and at times may be definitive in coming to an accurate conclusion.

Dorsey's structuring of Psalm 1:⁷

"righteous keep separate from the wicked (1:1-2)"

"fruitful, secure state of righteous (1:3)"

"barren, insecure state of the wicked (1:4)"

"wicked will be kept separate from the (blessed) righteous on judgment day (1:5-6)"

Another and more simplistic structuring would be that which Charles Spurgeon provides in his commentary on Psalm 1.⁸

1:1-3 The blessedness of the godly man - his exercises and blessings from the Lord.

1:4-6 Then by contrast the ungodly man - his character, conduct, and doom.

So what is a good starting point here? I believe the best starting point is exercising the ten disciplines that I prescribed for all of the Sunday School Students that will give you a natural and functioning ownership/mastery of the text.⁹ Personally, I listened to Psalm 1 countless times, read it numerous times, marked it up, and wrote it out. Then I worked through four different structures before I settled on the one I provided you.

Note that thoughtfully marking the text alone shows you the overwhelming contrast between the righteous and the wicked: 1:1 *not, nor, nor*; 1:2 *but, and, and*; 1:3 *and, nor*; 1:4 *not, but*; 1:5 *not, nor*; 1:6 *but*. If you see this then you have come to the same conclusion as myself, of Dorsey, Spurgeon, and of the other faithful men that I have read in my own preparations.

⁵ David A. Dorsey; *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis-Malachi*. Baker Books, 1999. (Hereafter: Dorsey), Pg.175

⁶ Dorsey, Pgs.175-176

⁷ Dorsey, Pg. 176

⁸ Spurgeon, Pg.1

⁹ I have provided these for you again at the conclusion of this guide.

Individual Verse Aids¹⁰

1:1

Terms

Counsel: advise, insightful instruction

Wicked: those who are antagonistic to the things of the LORD, "...the godless, whose moral condition is lax...."¹¹

Sinners: "...pass their lives in sin, especially coarse and manifest sin...."¹²

Scoffers: "...who make that which is divine, holy, and true a subject of frivolous jesting."¹³
Avoiding the seat of scoffers Spurgeon writes, "The seat of the scorner may be very lofty, but it is very near to the gate of hell; let us flee from it, for it shall soon be empty, and destruction shall swallow up the man who sits therein."¹⁴

Sit: to be seated and/or dwelling/inhabiting - appears to have the sense of settled longevity

The Blessed Man

The blessed man is first defined by what he is not (note the uses of *not*, *nor*, and *nor*). Then there is a contrasting conjunction that begins 1.2 where it addresses what he is.

When contrasting how the righteous man does not walk Spurgeon states, "His footsteps are ordered by the Word of God, and not by the cunning and wicked devices of carnal men."¹⁵

Try to discern if there is a pattern in this verse: *walk*, *stand*, *sit*? In motion, idle, and rested?

John Calvin sees the different elements as individual digressions that slowly increase their grip and effectual corruption.¹⁶

Blessed (or happy) Examined – Selected References Word Study

Deut.33.29 "Happy are you, O Israel!" - the conclusion of Moses' final blessing for Israel before his death... quite intense and wonderful with a magnificent ending! *Teachers read the whole chapter!* Hear this amazing and final exhortation by Moses to Israel... now to the righteous man, you are blessed!

1.Kgs.10.8 "Happy are your men! Happy are your servants..." - the queen of Sheba's response to seeing and experiencing Solomon's wisdom and magnificence.

Ps.32.1-2 "Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit." - descriptions of one made righteous in the LORD, not unlike the man described in Ps.1.

Ps.65.4 "Blessed is the one you choose and bring near, to dwell in your courts!" - "you" is referring to the LORD and this speaks of the blessing of the high privilege of being in his presence.

Ps.94.12 "Blessed is the man whom you discipline, O LORD, and whom you teach out of your law..." - this comes after several grievous verses of the treatment received by the wicked, there is a clear transition and then this comes bursting through to really change the scene!

¹⁰ ALL Scripture Quotations are from the ESV Bible unless the Scripture reference is in a quote from another author – their original text/translation was kept.

¹¹ Keil & Delitzsch, Pg.49

¹² Keil & Delitzsch, Pg.49

¹³ Keil & Delitzsch, Pg.49

¹⁴ Spurgeon, Pg.1

¹⁵ Spurgeon, Pg.1

¹⁶ John Calvin; Calvin's Commentaries, Volume 4 – Joshua-Psalms 1-35. Baker Books, 2003. (Hereafter: Calvin), Pg.3

Ps.112.1 "Praise the LORD! Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who greatly delights in his commandments!" - this Psalm has many thematic similarities with Ps.1.

Ps.119.1-3 "Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the LORD! Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, who seek him with their whole heart, who also do no wrong, but walk in his ways!"

Pro.3.13 "Blessed is the one who finds wisdom..."

Defining blessed in this context Dr. MacArthur states, "From the perspective of the individual, this is a deep-seated joy and contentment in God; from the perspective of the believing community, it refers to redemptive favor."¹⁷ Having read and worked through the above text and this Psalm how might you define blessed in this context?

Do the blessings in Matt.5.1-12 teach us anything about being blessed? Remember this is a foundational Psalm and the Sermon on the Mount is a foundational sermon taught by Jesus who in his deity inspired the Psalmist and in his humanity was a great Hebrew Rabbi.

1:2

Terms

Delight: satisfaction, good pleasure, desire.

Meditate: giving thorough and thoughtful attention to a matter, soaking it in and absorbing its fullness, often having an audible component of muttering or moaning - softly chewing on the words/thoughts.

The Delight of the Righteous Man

The passage starts off with a contrasting conjunction, transitioning from what the blessed/righteous man is not to what the blessed/righteous man is...

Spurgeon insightfully notes that the righteous man is not simply the one who "does not" but the one who "does" - he does delight in God's Word....¹⁸

This is why we do the hard work... so that we can be like the blessed man who grasps/understands the Word of God, who lets the Word of God soak in, and then after the Word of God has taken root we actively apply its fruit.

The blessed/righteous man is known for delighting in the Law of the LORD which fundamentally made him both who he was not as well as who he was. The blessed/righteous man tells us if you want to be the "best you" - delight in and keep the Law of the LORD, the Word of God! The blessed/righteous man tells us if you want to be happy, joyful, satisfied, have peace, etc.... Then delight in and keep the Word of God!

The Law of the LORD

The Law of the LORD or Torah (Genesis through Deuteronomy) provides the foundation of the inspired Word of God and more precisely our understanding of the LORD and Man's relationship with him. Some of its key elements include: A) The Creation, B) The Fall, C) The Promise, D) Worldwide Judgment(s), E) The Covenant Promise, F) The Nation/People of Promise, G) The Deliverance/Exodus, H) God's Powerful Redemption and Care, I) The Law Proper (consisting of religious responsibilities and of civil/personal responsibilities). It is also abundantly clear that there are blessings in obediently keeping The Law of God and curses for disobedience to The Law of God.

¹⁷ John MacArthur; The MacArthur Study Bible. Word Bibles, 1997. (Hereafter: MacArthur), Pg.743

¹⁸ Spurgeon, Pg.2

The Law of the LORD – A Central Element of Life

The Law of the LORD was to consume the attention and thoughts of the people of God. Take note of this emphasis as developed in the following texts:

Ex.24.12/31.18 Moses was given the Law of the LORD from the LORD directly and was even provided tablets of stone written on by the very finger of God.

Deut.17.18-20 before entering the Promise Land Israel was given instructions about their kings - initially prohibitions that they were to yield to and then clear instructions on how to make their reign strong and prosperous, "And when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law, approved by the Levitical priests. And it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes, and doing them, that his heart may not be lifted up above his brothers, and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, either to the right hand or to the left, so that he may continue long in his kingdom, he and his children, in Israel."

Take note of those Psalm 1 components here: The king was to write out the Law, keep the Law with him, read the Law all the days of his life, he was to do these things to the end that he might fear the LORD God - keeping and doing all that the Law requires and that he might not turn aside.

Deut.27-28 provides the instructions for Israel's magnificent and national reminder of the severity and blessing of their relationship to the Law of the LORD. Psalm 1 is also a compact summary of these chapters – the blessings of keeping The Law and the curses of failing to keep The Law.

Deut.31.10-11 Israel was to have times designated for the reading of the Law before the whole nation.

Josh.1.7-8 Joshua is commissioned by the LORD himself and a central element of this commissioning is to be both courageous and more importantly to keep the Law of the LORD, "Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success."

Joshua is charged to be a Psalm 1 man! He is to meditate on the Law of the LORD day and night... so that he will do it, be prosperous, and have good success... *like a tree planted by streams of water.*

Meditating on The Law, The Scriptures

I love how Spurgeon speaks of meditating on the Law of the LORD day and night, "He takes a text and carries it with him all the day long; and in the night-watches, when sleep forsakes his eyelids, he museth upon the Word of God. In the day of his prosperity he sings psalms out of the Word of God, and in the night of his affliction he comforts himself with promises out of the same book."¹⁹

Mindful of all you have read regarding the centrality of The Law/The Scriptures and the absolute attention that their mediation should take we should heed a gentle rebuke and redeem our time ever more aggressively. Out with the hours of social media, internet surfing, television, and obsessing over sports - give your soul time to take in and chew thoroughly upon the Word of God!

¹⁹ Spurgeon, Pg.2

Meditation on the Word of God is one of my primary objectives with this entire season of study - slow down and give your soul time to be seasoned and changed by the Word of God - may you be known for mumbling meditations as the Spirit of God works his effectual work through your time and attention to his truths.

1:3

Terms:

Prosper, succeed, to thrive and know the advantages of blessing.

A Botanical Illustration

Psalm 1 provides a rather straight forward image provided for the righteous man - healthy, strong, producing, etc.

Like a tree planted by water - Jeremiah uses a very similar picture: Jer.17.5-8 "Thus says the LORD: 'Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the LORD. He is like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see any good come. He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land. 'Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit.'" Regarding this text Keil and Delitzsch's commentary on Psalm 1 stated that Jeremiah was likely directly referencing, applying, and mildly reworking Psalm 1.²⁰

Understanding Righteous Prosperity

How is the prospering of the righteous reconciled with the struggles of the righteous and the prospering of the wicked?

We were just studying the book of Titus. How do we think through a passage such as Titus 3:8 in view of this passage? They appear complimentary, and like the beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12) show, blessing and prosperity are not always demonstrated in one's immediate/personal welfare, but are always for their eternal good and in some measure their present good as grace amidst struggle is priceless, particularly when that struggle is conforming you to the Savior. This is not always easy to see or appreciate and there often remains a tension present regarding the seeming lack of active prosperity and blessing for the righteous man. To help us think through this Charles Spurgeon provides the following, "Our worst things are often our best things. As there is a curse wrapped up in the wicked man's mercies, so there is a blessing concealed in the righteous man's crosses, losses, and sorrows. The trials of the saint are a divine husbandry, by which he grows and brings forth abundant fruit."²¹

The ESV Study Bible also provides another perspective on what prospering can look like, directing one's attention away from themselves being the exclusive or even primary beneficiaries of their prosperity. It states that the righteous prospers, not necessarily for himself, but for the benefit of others and this prosperity is not necessarily material prosperity either - he is ultimately bringing some benefit to others.²²

1:4

There is another direct contrast in this verse – now the attention is back on the wicked who do not and will not know the immediate, and as later addressed, eternal blessings/advantages of the righteous.

Dr. MacArthur describes chaff as that which is "unsubstantial, without value, and worthy only to be discarded"²³

²⁰ Keil & Delitzsch, Pg.48

²¹ Spurgeon, Pg.2

²² English Standard Version Study Bible. Crossway, 2008. Pg.942

²³ MacArthur, Pg.743

1:5

Terms:

Judgment, Justice, Rules.

Sinners: offenders of God's righteousness.

Congregation, Gathering, Assembly, Company.

Righteous: those who are just or right before God, innocent.

A Comparison of the Wicked

"Therefore," speaking in light of the immediate contrasts between the righteous and the wicked.

Whereas the righteous do not walk, stand, or sit in the company of the wicked so the wicked have no secure standing before the Righteous/Just Judge and are without hope at the day of his reckoning. Whereas the righteous find no satisfaction or place to settle among the wicked, so the wicked find no satisfaction or place to settle among the righteous.

"When the time of the divine decision shall come, which also separates outwardly that which is now inwardly separate, viz., righteous and unrighteous, wheat and chaff, then shall the unrighteous be driven away like chaff before the storm, and their temporary prosperity, which had no divine roots, come to a fearful end." (K&D pg.51)

1:6

Terms:

Perish, Destroyed, Undone

Know: refers to more than cognitive recognition of facts, but also intimate and complete knowledge. Note how this is juxtaposed to the conclusion of the wicked - unknown by God and destined to perish.

The LORD in Psalm 1

This verse provides the first direct reference to the LORD or his acting in Psalm 1, but he is clearly present throughout the Psalm: it is by The LORD's good pleasure that any man can be counted blessed (1:1); it is The LORD's Law that is to be cherished, delighted in, and thoroughly consumed (1:2); it is The LORD that plants the righteous and causes him to prosper (1:3); it is The LORD that disregards the wicked (1:4); it is The LORD that stands as the righteous judge and who opposes the wicked who do not love or submit to his Law (1:5); and here... it is The LORD that knows his own intimately and completely, but who will undo the wicked who neither know The LORD or are known by him.

The Way of the Righteous and The Way of the Wicked

Note that the "way of the righteous" is directly contrasted with the "way of the wicked" – Psalm 1's final contrast between these two and a fitting summary by conclusion.

"The way, i.e., the life's course, of the righteous has God as its goal."²⁴

²⁴ Keil & Delitzsch, Pg.51