

Psalm 1, The Godly and Ungodly Person

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Summary

Psalm 1 is a fitting start for the entire book. This psalm contrasts the godly believer with the ungodly person. The godly believer delights in and meditates on Yahweh's word and so makes the right choices about ideas, activities, and relationships. He reaps spiritual joy, contentment, and production because of his right relationship with Yahweh, while the ungodly person has a spiritually worthless life, though from the human viewpoint he may be temporarily successful and prosperous. In the end the godly will be saved and blessed while the ungodly will perish.

Outline

1. The spiritually happy, godly believer, 1-3.
2. The ungodly person, 4-5.
3. The end of the godly and ungodly, 6

Verse summary

Psalm 1.1. The blessed person is the one who makes the right choices about people and ideas. Worldview is important. Blessed "ashrey" refers to the person who, because he is rightly related to God, lives a godly righteous life and so has spiritual joy, contentment, and satisfaction. Verse 1 says what he does not do. He does not do certain things: walk in the counsel of the wicked (takes the advice of the wicked about how to live), stand in the path of sinners (one stops and considers the sinners' ideas, values, purpose), sit in the seat of scoffers (joins with the scoffers). These are three levels or three surrounding circles of lifestyle of ungodly people. He does not do these things and so is blessed.

Psalm 1.2. The godly person has a definite mental attitude and outlook. The Bible is the basis for worldview, thinking, and activity. The Bible is important to him. The blessed person "ashrey," delights in, enjoys, takes pleasure in the law of the LORD (God's word) and meditates (thinks over and over) in it very often. Meditation includes remembering the text, thinking in detail about the text, conversing with God about the text, and properly applying the text to one's life. This sets him off from other people. Both verbs are thinking verbs. Joyful spiritual life begins with knowing and thinking before there is any doing. Right thinking because of right knowledge results in the spiritual prosperity of verse 3.

Psalm 1.3. The tree image speaks of spiritual prosperity. This is a simile. The blessed man is like a tree. Follow the psalmist's thought. The godly person has made the right choices (Psa 1.1), makes the LORD's word his authority, guide, and pleasure (Psa 1.2), and as a result has spiritual health (planted by water), spiritual production (fruit and leaf), and spiritual prosperity (תלך tsalach to advance, to prosper Psa 1.3). The production, health, and prosperity refer to spiritual or godly traits. The Psalms and all the Bible indicate not monetary or material success, but relationship and fellowship with God and service for God. All the godly heroes of Scripture faced trials, hardships, and sufferings.

Psalm 1.4. This is another simile. The wicked (רשע, rasha' guilty, wicked, impious) or better the ungodly, are compared to chaff. Chaff is what is left after the grain is removed. Chaff is the stalk that is easily blown by the wind. Today it is called straw. The ungodly may do good things from the world's perspective, but from God's perspective they and their works produce no godly product and are lost. Why? Because they are not nourished by "the law of the LORD" (Psa 1.2-3).

Psalm 1.5. When God judges the ungodly they will not stand up and survive the judgment. There are many judgments specified in the Bible. Psalm 1 indicates some prominent judgment at a specific time and place. The judgment of Psalm 1 is the Great White Throne judgment of Revelation 20, or in Jewish thought, the last judgment. They will be excluded from the assembly of the righteous people—where the righteous gather.

Psalm 1.6. The LORD is the king. He is the sovereign all knowing righteous judge. He knows the "way" of the righteous and the "way" of the ungodly. Way is the Hebrew word derek (דֶּרֶךְ) and refers to the way of life, the course of one's life. He knows their life and service. The LORD knows all of that for the righteous and the wicked. Way likely refers the person, is kind of life, and the product of his life. The LORD judges and condemns or rewards because he is the LORD. We want to be in the righteous group—godly believers who delight in and meditate on his word and so are spiritually happy, spiritually productive, and spiritually successful. See Psalm 146.9 (way of the wicked), Psalm 67.2 (God's way), Proverbs 4.19 (way of the wicked), Proverbs 12.26 (way of the wicked), Proverbs 15.9 (way of the wicked), Jeremiah 12.1 (way of the wicked).

Review of main thoughts

The godly and spiritually happy person does not participate with ungodly

1. Does not walk in—the advice, thinking, worldview
2. Does not stand in—contemplate and act
3. Does not sit in—companions and organizations

But he does

1. Delight in the law of the LORD (Yahweh's Torah).
2. Meditate on the law of the LORD (Yahweh's Torah).

The godly and spiritually happy person gains...

1. Spiritual nourishment
2. Spiritual stability
3. Spiritual production
4. LORD'S approval

The ungodly person's...

1. Life and works lack lasting value
2. Is unstable
3. Has the LORD'S disapproval

So what for us?

1. From this psalm we learn that we must make choices and not participate in the advice or counsel, life patterns (how they go about their affairs), and groups who are unbiblical and therefore ungodly. We live in the world, but we do not follow the non-biblical worldview.

Jesus said that we are in the world but not of the world (John 17.11-18). Where do we get our counsel? What activities do we engage in? Where do we find our primary camaraderie?

2. Our spiritual happiness and biblical godliness come from a right relationship and fellowship with the LORD Yahweh through his word, the Bible. Do we have spiritual happiness and biblical godliness? See John 17, Jesus' joy in crisis.
3. The LORD'S word is our spiritual nourishment. By delighting in his word (wanting it and taking pleasure in it) and meditating on it (listening to it, thinking, relating, asking questions, memorizing) we are spiritually nourished. Without this nourishment we are like the ungodly—unstable and good for nothing. So, we ought to delight in and meditate in the LORD'S word.
4. God will judge people in the future. Jesus Christ will evaluate believers at the judgment seat of Christ. Our being fed, nourished, and directed by the Bible will determine the outcome of Christ's evaluation. Believers will be rewarded for their service. Ungodly believers will gain very limited rewards. The ungodly unbelievers will be judged at the great white throne judgment and will have no part in God's future kingdom. What do we look forward to?