

A Song for Every Season

A Study on the Psalms

Week 2 – Psalm 1 & 2

Introducing the Psalms for both individual and corporate use.

Psalm 1 – Delight in the Law to Live Well

- Psalm 1 is a Wisdom Psalm that teaches a basic principle of life – the way a person lives his life is decisive for how it turns out (See also Deut. 30; Prov. 9:6; Matt. 7:13-14).
- The Psalm takes the form of a beatitude: “Blessed is the one . . .”
 - It has a close parallel to Jeremiah 17:7-8.
 - Jesus used the same kind of statement in Matthew 5:1-12.
- The Psalm separates people into two camps, “the wicked” and “the righteous.”
 - The righteous are not to be thought of as perfect people. Rather, they are those who seek to be right with God which may include the humble confession of sins.
 - The wicked, on the other hand, are those who reject God’s authority and seek to live according to their own abilities and desires.
- In order to choose the correct path, a person must say no to the wrong path.
 - The righteous refuse to walk in step with the wicked or stand on the path of sinners. There is probably not much of a difference between the wicked and sinners.
 - The third group are those who are cynical. They scoff at God’s authority and those who attempt to live by his ways.
 - The Psalm doesn’t call for total isolation from sinners, but rather a refusal to walk in their ways. Jesus ate with sinners but he did not act like them.
- In contrast to the scoffers, the righteous person delights in the law of the Lord.
 - In its most literal sense, this means delighting in the first five books of the Bible.
 - The word *torah* is better translated instruction. The ancient Hebrew had more in mind when they used this word than simply a list of rules and regulations – they had in mind God’s instructions for life and wisdom.
 - In the context of the book, Psalm 1 introduces the Psalter as an extension of God’s instruction. The blessed person delights in God’s law and one of the places that happens is through the study of and recitation of the Psalms.
- The result of delighting in God’s law is a fruitful life.
 - The Psalmist compares the righteous person to a tree planted by streams of water – an apt metaphor in an arid land.
 - The promise of prospering took on two distinct avenues in the Old Testament.

- In some instances, obedience to the law was equated with tangible benefits in this life, including the possession of land, having plenty to eat, and enjoying a wife and a large family (see Psalm 37:25; 128:3; 144 and Josh 1:8).
 - Other Psalms (and the book of Job) call into question whether true prosperity can be equated with tangible benefits in the here and now.
- The wicked face another fate – that of their own destruction.
 - Instead of being a fruitful tree, their lives prove to have no substance and nothing to sustain them – they are like chaff that blows in the wind.
 - Though they may stand tall in this life, they will not stand in the judgment (v 5).
- The Psalm ends with a clear promise that God watches over the righteous, but allows the wicked to experience the destruction of their own ways.

Psalm 2 – God is in charge so put your trust in him.

- The second Psalm widens the view from that of the individual on earth to the view of earth from God's throne.
- It begins with a question about why the nations of the earth plot in vain.
 - The question acknowledges that the nations of the earth (led by their kings) attempt to reorder the world according to their own agendas.
 - The Psalmist, as a member of the tiny nation of Israel, would know what it was like to suffer the consequences of their much larger neighbors' global ambitions.
 - The Psalm assumes these global chess moves are vanity.
- God scoffs at the kings of the earth.
 - They are examples of the wicked who scoff at him (see Psalm 1).
 - God, who sits enthroned in heaven, is not threatened by their ambitions.
- God's response to their ambitions is to install his king on Zion.
 - Zion is the name for Jerusalem, or more specifically, the Temple Mount in Jerusalem.
 - God calls the king his son.
 - This was common language in the ancient near east and this Psalm was probably first written to mark the coronation of one of Israel's kings.
 - Over time, the language in this Psalm took on a Messianic meaning.
 - Jews began to anticipate a king who would one day fulfill the promises of this Psalm and others like it.
- The Psalmist calls on earthly kings to acknowledge the Lord's sovereignty, and to submit to him and his ways (v 10).
 - This serves primarily as a reminder to those who worship the Lord to remain faithful even when the nations rage around them.
 - God will one day rise up in a way that sets the world aright.
 - Those who have taken refuge in the Lord will be proven blessed on that day (v 12).

Sources

- Davidson, Robert, *The Vitality of Worship* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1998).
- Goldingay, John, *Psalms*, Volume 1: Psalms 1-41, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Academic, 2006).
- May, James L., *Psalms*, Interpretation (Louisville KY: John Knox, 1994).