

Meditating on Psalm 1 (PART 1)

Introduction and Overview

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My Translation of Psalm 1

Though this study is patterned after the New International Version, you are encouraged to read Psalm 1 in other translations. Here is my own translation of this psalm:

Psalm 1

Blessed is the person
 who does not follow the advice of the wicked,
 or choose the way of sinners,
 or associate with those who mock,
 but who instead delights in the teachings of the Lord,
 and thinks about those teachings day and night.

He is like a tree planted by streams of water
 - a tree that produces fruit in its season,
 and whose leaves do not wither.

Everything he does prospers.

Not so for the wicked!
They are like empty grain husks
 that the wind blows away.
So the wicked will not be left standing at the judgment.
 Sinners will not be left standing with the righteous people.

For the Lord watches over the way of righteous people,
 but the way of the wicked leads to destruction.

Introduction to Meditating on Psalm 1

In some ways, this study about Psalm 1 is difficult to write. This psalm encourages us to think about what is being said... and the more a person thinks about it, the more he will find in it! As a result, it could be said that this study is incomplete! It is "open ended."

This psalm encourages us to *meditate on* or *delight in* the Law of the Lord. It does so, not by *command* (as Joshua 1:8 does), but by *example*. It describes what the person is like, who meditates on God's Word. Simply stated, he is *blessed*. In Joshua we read that if we obey the command to meditate/think on the Word, we will prosper and be successful. Here it simply says that the one who does this *does* prosper. It's just a fact of life.

The more that a person wants to do what "blessed people" do (described in verses 1-2), the more he will be blessed! The more you learn God's Word and let it influence the way you think and live, the more you will be like the blessed person described here. [Of course, there is also the contrasting principle, for those who do *not* have such desires (verses 4-5) and it is definitely *not* a blessing!]

An Overview to the Psalm

As you begin, start with the whole psalm. Observe the two types of people, the two ways, and the two results. Observe the primary emphasis: the way God wants us to follow! Then begin looking more closely at the individual sections... and finally at the words and phrases.

This psalm is readily divided into 3 sections:

- Verses 1-3 describe the righteous.
- Verses 4-5 describe the wicked.
- Verse 6 is a fitting conclusion to the whole psalm, telling us *why* the previous verses are true.

As you look closer at the sections, focus on the flow of thought, or "thought patterns." (If you have learned about the way Hebrew poetry is structured, you will find it helpful.)

We will first look at the whole passage (summarized) and then take a closer look at the individual parts.

SUMMARY

Here, the psalm is summarized in order that we can quickly see the structure or patterns. The three sections (mentioned above) are numbered. Both of the first two sections can be divided into three parts:

- a. A description of who the person is (righteous or wicked).
 - b. What he is like.
 - c. The end result of his way of life.

Here is the summary:

THE DESCRIPTION OF THE "*BLESSED*" ONE:

Having got this far, seeing the basic flow of thought, we can now proceed to a more in-depth look at the verses.

First, consider the description of the blessed one. (I've joined together the parallel concepts, such as walk/sit/stand, which are found in the separate lines of the verses. They can be examined individually, later.)

- 1 HE DOES NOT... walk/stand/sit
in the counsel/way/seat
of the wicked/sinners/mockers.
- 2 HE DOES... delight in / meditate on the Law of the Lord...
day and night.

As a result of this (because of what he *does* and what he *does not* do)...

- 1 HE IS LIKE: a tree.
- 2 HOW? Two ways: fruitful
 - provided for (leaves NOT withering)
- 3 The final result (or the application of this truth):
 - = whatever he does prospers.

THE DESCRIPTION OF THE "NOT SO" ONE:

The "not so" person is also described, but the description is much shorter. He is simply described as "wicked."

- 1 HE IS LIKE: chaff.
- 2 HOW? One way is described: He will be "blown away."
- 3 The final result (or the application of this truth):
= the wicked/sinners will not stand in the judgment/assembly.

THE REASON OR BASIC PRINCIPLE:

Why will the wicked not stand? For that matter, why also will the blessed one's ways prosper? See verse 6:

- 1 THE WAY OF THE RIGHTEOUS: the LORD watches (= implying protection and care)
- 2 THE WAY OF THE WICKED: perishes

It's just a fact of life: these two things happen this way. (And since we know it, it's up to us to decide which way we are going to follow!)

Some Additional Comments About the Two Categories of People in Psalm 1

This is a serious issue. Throughout Scripture, people are divided into two categories. There isn't a third category.

Many people want to call themselves "Christian," even though the characteristics of the righteous are absent from their lives. Yet in this psalm, there are people who *do* meditate on, and delight in, God's Word, and there are people who *don't*. **What other category is there?** Either you *do* or you *don't*! And if you *don't*, you are, *by definition*, wicked.

This doesn't mean you aren't "religious." It doesn't mean you go around murdering people, committing sexual sin, lying, and the rest. Some wicked people *will* do things like that, but others will look good and morally upright, and perhaps even religious. The problem is that they don't *delight* in God and his Word - and that is an even greater sin, than murder, adultery, or lying. Why? Because it deals with our *primary* obligation of loving God with all our heart, soul and mind. Love for neighbor, though important, is secondary, in comparison. (Matthew 22:36-40.)

Remember that some of Jesus' most scathing rebukes were directed *not* toward the "bad sinners" (adulterers, murders, etc.), but toward the "good, morally upright" people who thought they were better than the "sinners," but who didn't give God the honor and glory that he deserves.

For more about this topic (including the issue of inconsistent living), see the article: The Righteous and the Wicked (Psalm 1).

Meditating on Psalm 1 (PART 2)

An In-Depth Look at the Psalm

An In-Depth Look at the Concepts of Psalm 1

- PART 1 - Verse 1
 - PART 2 - Verse 2
 - PART 3 - Verse 3
 - PART 4 - Verse 4
 - PART 5 - Verse 5-6
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An In-Depth Look at the Concepts of Psalm 1

- This study looks at various parts of the Psalm, but also brings in passages from elsewhere in the Bible.
 - Below are just a few of the many observations and comments that could be made. There is so much more that could be done. You might want to explore this topic in a completely different way!
 - One general question you could be thinking about, as you study this psalm: What does it mean to be blessed? Your understanding of what it means may grow in depth and richness, as you grow in your understanding of this Psalm.
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PART 1 - VERSE 1

Much emphasis is often given to the supposed "progression" into compromise and sin, because of the order of the words: walk...stand...sit. But this is not the primary emphasis. These are *parallel concepts*: the three lines reflect similar thoughts. (See the article about Hebrew poetry for more information.) The main concern found here is the same as what is mentioned by the apostle Paul, in 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1 (read it). This concept is mentioned *many* times throughout the Bible.

We will focus on the main words found in verse 1. A selection of verses which contain these words, are listed below. Though the selection is limited to the Psalms and Proverbs, you are welcome to look elsewhere in the Bible. Read some of these verses, perhaps starting with those in Proverbs. *Be sure to look at the contexts of these passages*, when doing so is relevant. (Many of the proverbs exist by themselves, and do not have a direct link to the verses in the context.)

BLESSED:

This word is occasionally translated as "happy," but it is *not* focusing only on life's pleasant circumstances. The person who knows God is blessed even if he finds himself in *difficult* circumstances in this world. Admittedly, we won't always "feel" blessed, when things are going bad. But God looks not only at present circumstances, but at the final outcome. [See the article: "What happens when things don't go right?" You may also want to think about (meditate on!) Romans 8:28.]

The following verses were selected because they focus on the blessedness that results from our relationship with God:

- Psalm 32:1-2; 34:8; 40:4; 84:12; 94:12; 112:1; 119:1-2
- Proverbs 8:32; 8:34; 29:18
- You may also want to look at the blessings listed in Matthew 5:3-12, which describe the blessings which belong to Jesus' followers.

WALK / COUNSEL:

The focus on "walk" may be the most frequently occurring of these three parallel phrases (walk, stand and sit). It refers to the way you live - your lifestyle. How do you walk? What type of lifestyle do you have? Whose counsel/advice do you follow? (For the most part, the following verses emphasize the word "walk.")

- Psalm 15:2; 26:3; 84:11; 86:11; 89:15; 107:11; 119:3; 128:1
- Proverbs 2:7; 2:13; 2:20; 4:14; 8:20; 9:6; 14:2

STAND / WAY:

The concept of the "way" (of the righteous or the wicked) occurs more frequently in the Bible than does the idea of "standing." So the word "way" will be the primary emphasis in the following verses. Before you look at them, think about the use of these two words ("stand" and "way") in verses 5 and 6.

- Psalm 5:5; 18:21; 24:3; 32:8; 76:7; 139:24
- Proverbs 2:12; 2:20; 4:11; 4:14; 4:19; 8:20; 9:6; 10:25; 10:29; 12:15; 12:26; 12:28; 13:15; 15:9; 22:6

SIT / SEAT / MOCKERS:

The previous two concepts could be said to focus on what people *think* and what they *do*. Here the emphasis is on what they *say*. (This, of course, is nothing more than a reflection of the heart's condition!) Most of the verses below deal with mockery.

- Psalm 26:4-5; 69:12; 89:50-51; 119:23; 119:51; 139:2
- Proverbs 1:22; 3:34; 9:12; 13:1; 14:6; 14:9; 15:12; 21:11; 21:24; 22:10

PART 2 - VERSE 2

DELIGHT / LAW / MEDITATE:

Look at Psalm 119. This reflects the attitude of the person who has a delight for "the law of the LORD." Examine some (or all) of that Psalm. Write down some of the characteristics of such a person.

Note that it is not enough to simply *avoid* the things mentioned in Psalm 1:1. To qualify for the description of verse 3, the characteristics of verse 2 *must be present!* The mere absence of "badness" does not guarantee "goodness." The "bad" must be *replaced with* the "good." You may wish to read passages elsewhere in the Bible, to see how widespread this concept really is. (Suggested example: Paul's epistles.)

DAY/NIGHT:

Both day and night belong to God (Psalm 74:16)! Other psalms mention praying (crying out) to God day and night, during trials (Psalm 22:2; 42:3; 88:1).

In Psalm 32:4, God is seen as having a "heavy hand" on David "day and night," guiding him toward repentance and confession of sins. But, unlike a person filled with rebellion and unbelief, David was filled with praise! He considered himself to be blessed (vs. 1-2).

PART 3 - VERSE 3

TREE:

The concept of "tree" is often used to describe various "spiritual truths." So are other types of plants. (Example: vine, John 15:1-8.) Look for other passages that use the concept of "tree." What can you learn from them? How is their message similar to (or different from) the message of Psalm 1? A few passages from the Psalms and Proverbs are given below. Be sure to look at the context!

- Psalm 37:35; 52:8; 92:12; 96:12
- Proverbs 3:18; 11:30; 13:12; 15:4

FRUIT:

The New Testament has a great emphasis on "fruit." So we will look up some of the verses which are in it. (Feel free to look for verses in the Psalms and Proverbs, too!)

- Matthew 3:8-10; 7:16-20; 12:33; 21:43; Luke 3:8-9; 6:43-44; 20:10; John 15:2; 15:4-5; 15:8; 15:16
- Romans 7:4-5; Galatians 5:22; Ephesians 5:9; Philippians 1:11; Colossians 1:6; 1:10; Hebrews 13:15; James 3:17; Jude 1:12

Pay attention to the concept of "fruit" that is portrayed in these verses (and in any other verses you may use). What is "fruit"? What causes fruit - in other words, what is the relationship between: 1) the fruit and God (and what he does), and 2) the fruit and us (and what we do)? Is fruit "optional"? If fruit does *not* exist, what can be said about the person? How does the message of these verses compare or contrast with popular views in the church, today?

TO PROSPER:

This concept is also seen in the study on Joshua 1:8. It might be beneficial to review that study [Joshua 1:8 - Commanded to meditate]. Some of the verses from the Psalms / Proverbs that mention this concept are:

- Psalm 25:13; 128:2
- Proverbs 3:2; 8:18; 11:10; 11:25; 13:21; 16:20; 17:20; 19:8; 21:21; 28:13; 28:25

To get the "whole picture," there is another type of "prosperity" which must also be considered.

- Job 21:13; 21:16; Psalm 10:5; 49:18; 73:3; Jeremiah 12:1; Malachi 3:15

Compare or contrast these two types of prosperity. What can you learn in these (and other) verses, that you can apply to yourself?

You may want to think about various *contrasting* concepts, such as the following:

1. Temporary vs. eternal (referring to how long the blessings will last)
2. Physical/material (by itself) vs. "spiritual" (looking at the contrast between blessings you can see and touch, and those which cannot be physically handled)
3. The present vs. the future (focusing on when you will receive them)

[OPTIONAL:]

A look at the concept of "withering" shows some interesting contrasts. You may wish to look at some of the following verses. Most of them, however, do not use this concept in the same way that we find in Psalm 1.

- Job 14:2; Psalm 37:2; 90:6; 129:6; Isaiah 40:7-8; 40:24; Matthew 13:6; Mark 4:6; Luke 8:6; John 15:6; James 1:11; 1 Peter 1:244
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PART 4 - VERSE 4

The plight of the wicked is summarized in two words! It's very simple: "NOT SO!" Think about the contrast with what has been said in verses 1-3. ("Meditate" on it!)

What are other characteristics of the wicked? The Psalms and Proverbs refer to them at least 135 times. Many of the verses describe their ultimate fate. Others describe what the wicked are like (character qualities) at the present time. Look at a few of these "character quality" verses from the Proverbs, given below. [Also, you may want to read an article about the nature of proverbs: "Comments About the Proverbs."]

- Proverbs 4:14-19; 5:22; 9:7; 10:11,20,24,32; 11:5,11,18; 12:5-6,10,12,26; 13:5; 15:6,28; 17:23; 19:28; 21:4,7,10,27,29; 28:15,28; 29:2,7,16,27

A few verses which use "chaff" to illustrate something are given below. You may wish to look at some of them.

- Psalm 35:5; 83:13; Isaiah 33:11; 40:24; Jeremiah 13:24; Hosea 13:3; Zephaniah 2:2; Matthew 3:12; Luke 3:17.
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PART 5 - VERSES 5-6

Verse 5 gives us the final "conclusion" to the plight of the wicked.

1 The wicked will not stand...

Verse 6 summarizes the whole Psalm, showing the striking contrast between the righteous and the wicked. This whole psalm is true, because...

2 The LORD watches... (over the righteous, but not over the wicked).

Let people take heed to the warning!

You may wish to look for other verses in which some of the words found in verses 5 and 6 occur (just like we did with the previous verses). The questions below focus on the *contrast* between the righteous and the wicked, and how this issue applies to us.

- What distinguishes these two people? Verse 6 describes two "ways." These two types of people have different ways of living. Review these two ways.
- You need to reflect on the fact that none of us lives totally consistent lives: 1) Consider how the two (the righteous and the wicked) may *at times* (temporarily) look similar. 2) Consider also how they are different. [See "Comments about the righteous and the wicked" for more about the problem of being inconsistent in one's walk (lifestyle).]
- Note the contrast between being "watched over" and "perishing." Other translations say, "The LORD *knows* the way of the righteous." It refers to God's special attention or focus on those who belong to him. He knows them in a special way. Such people will *never* hear God say, "I never *knew* you. Away from me, you evildoers!" (Matthew 7:23)
- Think about these two verses for a few days. Study them. Read other Psalms, keeping watch for similar concepts. If you are aware of verses elsewhere in the Bible that mention a similar concept, you may wish to include them in your thoughts. Do whatever you think would be beneficial to impress these concepts upon your mind.
- Think about how these things apply to you. Which of the promises apply to you? (There are promises for each category of people - for the wicked and for the righteous.) Do the things you have discovered in Psalm 1 require you to make changes in the way you live? Explain.
- If you are trying to live a life that is half-way between the "righteous" and the "wicked," what are you going to do about it? (God does not speak kindly about compromise, half-hearted discipleship, hypocrisy, double-mindedness, lukewarmness, etc. You *cannot* follow God if you still love the world.)

Meditating on Psalm 1 (PART 3)

Summary and Application

- PART 1 - Summary Questions
 - PART 2 - Application
-

PART 1 - SUMMARY QUESTIONS

- Describe the individual who is called "*blessed*" - both the "positive" (what he is/does) and the "negative" (what he isn't/doesn't). (v. 1-2) What is his attitude toward the Bible? Describe the opposite person, the one who is "*not so.*" (v.4+)
- Both of these types of people can be described as being like something. One is like a tree; the other like chaff. Why did the psalmist characterize them in this manner? What do these things tell us about the results or consequences of each of these person's way of life?
- How does "meditation" fit into the picture? Which comes first, meditation or a changed heart? (Or if you believe the issue is more complex than that, explain.)

You may want to consider *memorizing* Psalm 1. If you have spent much time *meditating* on it, it shouldn't be very difficult for you to memorize it!

PART 2 - APPLICATION

- Do you delight in God's Word? Do you have a desire to meditate on it? (How often do you meditate on it/think about it?) Why or why not? Does your attitude in this matter suggest anything about your nature/heart? What? Find some verses that describe your situation. (There are many, especially in the New Testament.)

Some people may claim to have a "desire" to meditate on God's Word... but they just don't do it! If you do *not* have a desire that results in action, perhaps you should consider the following: 1) *repentance*, and 2) *prayer* for a changed attitude, a renewed mind, and a change in values and priorities.

- Think about the contrasts given in this chapter. How do you fit in? How might you improve (even if you seem to be doing quite well)?
- How are you being blessed (or not blessed)?