

# 119

## MINISTRIES

*“The following is a direct script of a teaching that is intended to be presented via video, incorporating relevant text, slides, media, and graphics to assist in illustration, thus facilitating the presentation of the material. In some places, this may cause the written material to not flow or sound rather awkward in some places. In addition, there may be grammatical errors that are often not acceptable in literary work. We encourage the viewing of the video teachings to complement the written teaching you see below.”*

### **Studies in Psalms: The Way of the Righteous (Psalm 1)**

Psalm 1 describes two paths or “ways” of living. There is the way of the righteous and the way of the wicked. One way leads to blessing, and the other to destruction. In this teaching, we will go through Psalm 1 and discuss how this Psalm encourages us to walk the path of righteousness.

But, before we get into the text, one of the fascinating features of Psalm 1 is that its designation as the first psalm was not actually random. Scholars have recognized that the final editors of the Book of Psalms picked Psalm 1 and Psalm 2 intentionally to be a type of introduction to the rest of the psalms. The reason for this was that Psalm 1 emphasizes meditating upon the Torah, and Psalm 2 reflects upon God’s promise to raise up a Messianic King. Psalm 1 begins by saying the one who delights in God’s Torah will be “blessed.” Psalm 2 ends by saying those who take refuge in the coming Messianic King will also be “blessed.” These beginning and ending statements frame the introduction to the Book of Psalms.

The scribes who arranged these writings into what we now know as the Book of Psalms viewed Psalms 1 and 2 as a type of gateway to the rest of the psalms. In fact, the scholar Tremper Longman further describes Psalm 1 as a gatekeeper to the “literary sanctuary” that is the psalms. Listen to what he says:

The physical sanctuary had Levitical gatekeepers who would restrict access to those who are righteous (see the entrance liturgies in Pss 15 and 24), so Psalm 1, with its description of the way of the righteous person who meditates on the law of God, and the way of the wicked, requires its reader to associate with one or the other. If righteous, the reader may proceed into the literary sanctuary and first encounter the Lord and his anointed one in Psalm 2. By the time of the post-exilic period during which the book arrived in its final form, Psalm 2 would have been read eschatologically, with the hope of a future Messiah. Thus, the first two psalms introduce the important themes of law and Messiah.

-Tremper Longman III, *Psalms* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), p. 35

Psalm 1’s emphasis on the Torah makes it a fitting part of the introduction to the psalms in another way. Scholars widely recognize that the Book of Psalms had been intentionally organized into five sections or

“books.” In most Bible translations, you might notice that the translators actually note the beginning of each of these five sections at various places—“Book 1,” “Book 2,” “Book 3,” and so forth.

The Book of Psalms’ organization into five sections corresponds to the five books of Moses—the Torah, or the Pentateuch. So when we read Psalm 1, we read the “set up”, if you will, to the rest of the psalms. The psalms are to be read as a type of “Torah,” or instruction manual. These writings are a prayer book and wisdom guide for those who walk according to the Law of Moses in anticipation of the coming Messianic King.

So, with that, let’s begin Psalm 1.

### **Psalm 1:1**

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers.

The psalm begins by announcing that those who distance themselves from evil are blessed. One must avoid walking, standing, and sitting with evil. Scholars point out that the order of these verbs may indicate a gradual descent into evil. It begins with walking alongside it, which then leads to “standing” with it. As Gerald Wilson notes:

The verb *ʿmd* [stands] has more the sense of “take a stand” than simply “stand still.” There is volition (and therefore responsibility) assumed in this action.

-Gerald Wilson, *Psalms* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002) Vol. 1, p. 94

So, “standing” with evil then moves to “sitting” with it. Or as Gerald Wilson remarks, dwelling with it—that is, taking up permanent residence. Here’s what he says:

The verb *yšb* [sits] can mean “sit down” or often “dwell, take up permanent residence” in a place.

-Gerald Wilson, *Psalms* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002) Vol. 1, p. 94

Additionally, on this gradual descent into evil, the author uses more forceful terms: “Wicked,” then “sinners,” and then finally “scoffers” or “mockers.” As Longman remarks:

Mockers are the most egregiously evil people, since they not only sin, but they also turn around and mock the innocent.

-Tremper Longman III, *Psalms* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), p. 56

So, the way of righteousness includes avoiding evil. Those who do so are “blessed,” which here expresses a state of happiness. In other words, if you want to be happy, then avoid evil. The psalmist now turns to another aspect of righteousness. This is what it says in verse 2.

### **Psalm 1:2**

But his delight is in the law of the Lord [YHWH], and on his law he meditates day and night.

The way of righteousness is delighting in the Torah and meditating on it day and night. Blessing—

happiness—is contingent on living in obedience to God’s commandments. As we read in Deuteronomy:

**Deuteronomy 30:19**

I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live.

So, delighting in God’s commandments is said to bring life and blessing. But we are not only to delight in the Torah; we are also to meditate on the Torah “day and night.” How do we do that?

Well, the Qumran sect fulfilled this exhortation by establishing a rotation of interpreters within their community to study and comment on the Torah literally twenty-four hours a day (1QS, Col. 6, lines 6-8). But it seems clear that the language of Psalm 1:2 is not meant to be taken literally in the strictest sense. After all, no one person could dedicate his or her entire day and night to study the Torah. There are other things people need to do, like sleep, which is why even the Qumran sect had people on rotation.

So, while we don’t take this exhortation literally, we do take it seriously. Psalm 1 says the righteous are to be diligent in their study of Scripture, continually looking to God’s wisdom. What this means is that we ought to immerse ourselves in the Torah, study it faithfully, and think about God’s ways throughout our day.

One practical way to bring to mind the Torah throughout the day is to wear tzitzit or “tassels.” God commands the wearing of tzitzit so that when we see them, we’ll remember God’s commandments (Numbers 15:37-41). In any case, the more that we study and meditate on the Torah, the more it transforms our thinking, and thus our way of living, and that brings us to the next verse in Psalm 1:

**Psalm 1:3**

He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.

When we reject evil and delight in the Torah, we become like a tree planted by streams of water. Trees were often planted close to rivers or man-made canals so that their roots could reach the supply of water. So, what the psalmist is saying is that the Torah is like that life-giving stream of water. And when we plant our hearts into God’s Word, like a well-watered tree, we thrive and produce fruit. Our roots become strong and deep. The one who is rooted in the Torah’s wisdom finds success in the work he does.

Let’s keep going here.

**Psalm 1:4**

The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.

So what is the author saying here? He says in contrast to the thriving, fruitful life of the righteous, the wicked—that is those who delight in evil—are like dry chaff. Chaff is the husks of grains and grasses, which have been separated from the seed after threshing. And, like chaff, the “fruit” of wickedness is worthless. Chaff has no connection to the life-giving stream of God’s Word. It has no roots, nothing to hold on to, and it easily rolls away as the wind blows. Consequently, the wicked, like chaff, will perish:

**Psalm 1:5-6**

Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; for the Lord [YHWH] knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

We will be judged for what we do. Our choices in this life have consequences, and YHWH is directly involved in giving each of us our rewards or punishments.

The psalmist declares that sinners have no place in the congregation of the righteous, which again plays into this idea of the psalms being a type of literary sanctuary and Psalm 1 being like the gatekeeper. If you are wicked, you are not to read any further. Just like the physical sanctuary did not permit the ritually impure, the sanctuary of the Psalms is for only those who walk the way of the righteous.

And that's Psalm 1. Two paths are set before us: the way of the righteous, and the way of the wicked. We are called to the way of the righteous. We are called to righteousness which involves rejecting evil, delighting in the Torah, and meditating upon God's ways.

In his famous sermon on the mount, Yeshua also calls us to the way of righteousness. He said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied" (Matthew 5:6), echoing the principle expressed in Psalm 1. That is, those who walk the way of the righteous will thrive. And if they suffer persecution for righteousness sake, they are still considered blessed. Why? Because they receive the kingdom of heaven—a better reward than anything this world has to offer (Matthew 5:10).

In Matthew 5:20, Yeshua admonishes us to pursue a righteousness that exceeds the scribes and Pharisees. Once again, this righteousness is directly tied to Torah observance. We know this because of the prior three verses. Yeshua had just finished affirming the ongoing validity of God's Law in verse 17, saying that he did not come to abolish it but fulfill it (Matthew 5:17). Then he said nothing from the Law would pass away until heaven and earth pass away and everything is accomplished—that is, the end of the age and the consummation of the kingdom, when heaven and earth pass away (Matthew 5:18; Revelation 21:1ff). And he also encouraged members of the kingdom to be "great" by keeping even the least of the commandments of God's Law (Matthew 5:19).

So, in other words, our Torah observance must be better than the scribes and Pharisees' Torah observance. While the scribes and Pharisees certainly had an appearance of righteousness on the outside, they weren't really walking in the way of the righteous. Yeshua constantly called out their hypocrisy and failure to uphold God's righteous ways all over the gospels (Matthew 23:3, 23, 25, 28). As Yeshua's disciples, we are not to be like the religious hypocrites; we are to actually do and teach the Torah's commandments, even the "least" of them (Matthew 5:19).

Additionally, Yeshua's teachings further clarify and draw out the deeper meanings of what it means to live righteously according to the Torah. Yeshua is not just another religious teacher, but the Prophet like Moses, whose words carry divine authority, as they are the very words of God (Deuteronomy 18:18).

That's why—similar to the two paths outlined in Psalm 1—Yeshua also describes two different ways and their destinations. The narrow gate, a life of obedience to God's ways, while it may be hard at times, it ultimately leads to life. In contrast, the wide gate, a life of sin and wickedness, will ultimately lead to destruction. Yeshua goes further to say that those who obey his teachings will be like a house built firmly upon the rock, stable and secure. Those who don't obey his teachings will be like a house built on sand, which, like the chaff in Psalm 1, will be swept away when the winds and rains come (Matthew 7:24-27).

So, this message is consistent throughout all of Scripture: delight in the Torah, meditate on it, and walk it out. Allow God's words to transform you as you study his commandments. This is what it means to walk the way of the righteous, a way that leads to life.

*We pray you have been blessed by this teaching.*

*Remember, continue to test everything.*

*Shalom!*

*For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at [www.testeverything.net](http://www.testeverything.net)*

**Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.**

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