

[Psalm 1](#). The first psalm serves as the gateway into the entire book of Psalms, stressing that those who would worship God genuinely must embrace his Law (or Torah), i.e., his covenant instruction. This psalm takes topics found in wisdom literature such as Proverbs and makes them the subject of song; the purpose is that those who sing the psalm will own its values—namely, they will want more and more to be people who love the Torah, who believe it, who see themselves as the heirs and stewards of its story of redemption and hope, and who seek to carry out its moral requirements. They can delight in the idea of being among the “righteous,” feeling that nothing can compare with such blessedness. By its sustained contrast, the psalm reminds readers that in the end there are really only two ways to live.

[Ps. 1:1–2](#) Contrasting Sources of Values. The truly happy person guides his life by God’s instruction rather than by the advice of those who reject that instruction.

[Ps. 1:1](#) **Blessed**. The truly happy person is happy because God showers him with favor. Jesus uses the Greek equivalent in [Matt. 5:3–11](#); cf. also [James 1:12](#). The Latin translation, *beatus*, is the source of the word *beatitude*. **the man**. A specific, godly individual (Hb. *ha’ish*, “the man”) is held up as an example for others to imitate. Such teaching by use of a concrete example is common in OT wisdom literature. **wicked ... sinners ... scoffers**. These are people, even within Israel, who refuse to live by the covenant; the godly person refuses to follow the moral orientation of such people’s lifestyle. Some have seen an increasing level of sinfulness in the terms “wicked-sinners-scoffers,” together with an increasing loyalty in the metaphors “walk-stand-sit”; however, it is likely that the terms “wicked” and “sinner” here are equivalent, while a “scoffer” is certainly more committed to evil (see note on [Prov. 19:25–20:1](#)).

[Ps. 1:2](#) **the law of the Lord**. As the esv footnote indicates, this could be taken as God’s *instruction* (Hb. *Torah*, which often designates the Law of Moses), particularly as he speaks in his covenant. For this reason no one should ever think that such a person receives his blessedness by deserving it, since the covenant is founded on God’s grace. **Meditates** describes an active pondering, perhaps even muttering to oneself in pursuit of insight. Some suppose **day and night** speaks of the work of professional scholars who spend all their time pondering the words of the law, but in view of the similar instruction in [Josh. 1:8](#), readers should see this as setting the ideal of facing every situation, be it ever so mundane, with a view to pleasing the Lord by knowing and following his Word.

[Ps. 1:3–4](#) Contrasting Fruitfulness. Here are two similes, based on agriculture in ancient Palestine, describing the effects of the two kinds of people.

[Ps. 1:3](#) The first image is that of a **tree** in a dry climate, which nevertheless thrives because of its constant supply of **water**. A tree bears fruit, not for itself, but for others; thus, when the faithful **prosper**, it is not for himself, nor is the prospering even necessarily material, but he succeeds in bringing benefit to others. See [Jer. 17:8](#) for the same image.

[Ps. 1:4](#) **wicked**. See [v. 1](#). **chaff**. This is the husks and straw removed by threshing, and it is lighter than the edible kernels; when a farmer tosses threshed wheat into the air, **the wind drives away** the chaff. Those who reject God’s covenant are like chaff in that they bring no benefit to anyone (cf. [35:5](#)).

[Ps. 1:5–6](#) **Contrasting Outcomes of Their Lives.** These two verses lead readers to reflect on where these two kinds of life are headed, showing that God will make the contrast last forever.

[Ps. 1:5](#) **Therefore** indicates that these verses are the conclusion of the psalm. **judgment.** This could be any particular judgment that falls on **the wicked** in this life, but it is more likely the final judgment, which allows some to enter the **congregation of the righteous**, while excluding others ([Eccles. 12:14](#)).

[Ps. 1:6](#) **Knows** must be something stronger than simply “knows about,” since God knows about the wicked and their deepest secrets (cf. [94:8–11](#)). Some have argued that the word means “cares for,” but it is better to take this as “knows with affection and approval, i.e., prefers” (cf. [Gen. 18:19](#); [Amos 3:2](#)). **will perish.** That is, end in destruction.