

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Bible Student* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bible-student_01.php

Himself, and imparting to him, Christ, as the supply of all need, having put away sin, the cause of all unrest and anxiety. That is the blessed message that comes to us by this title of the LORD—JEHOVAH-SHALOM.

“Peace, perfect peace, in this dark world of sin?
The blood of Jesus whispers, peace within.”

WORD STUDIES IN THE FIRST PSALM

PROF. J. LEO GREEN

The first Psalm is anonymous. It is apparently impossible to ascertain with any great degree of accuracy who wrote it or when it was written. The fact that date and authorship are unknown lends weight to the Psalm. It is timeless in its message.

In a few well-chosen, meaningful words the Psalmist sketches two sharply contrasting pictures. The first is the picture, of the happy and successful man; the second, the picture of the man whose life ends in abject failure. Let us examine these pictures rather closely.

I. *The Picture of the Happy and Successful Man* (vv. 1-3).

‘O the happiness of the man . . . all that he does he carries through to effective conclusion!’ *’Ashre* (‘O the happiness!’) is a plural noun in the construct state. It is an abstract plural, magnifying or intensifying the idea contained in the stem. It is derived from a verb which means ‘be or go straight’. *’Ashre* never loses entirely the original sense but it signifies much more than mere ‘straightness’. It embraces all that was involved in real happiness from the standpoint of the Old Testament saint.

Because of our innate desire to be happy and successful in life we watch with keen-eyed interest as the Psalmist draws the picture of the man who achieves true blessedness. He describes him, first, by telling what he *avoids*; second, by telling what he *chooses*; and, third, by telling what *he is like*.

1. *What he avoids* (v. 1).

At the outset the Psalmist makes it quite clear that the man who attains genuine happiness makes no terms with sin. He severs relations with everything that smacks of evil. He refuses to walk in the counsel of the ungodly, to stand in the way of sinners, to sit in the seat of scoffers.

The verbs in v. 1 are in the perfect tense. They are perfects of experience, indicating what the individual referred to has not done and, it may reasonably be expected, will not do.

The *resha'im* ('ungodly') are those who are off centre, without stay, and, therefore, restless and tossed about. The noun *resha'im* is very closely related to a verb root meaning 'be loose, disjointed, tossed about'. The *resha'im* are not necessarily immoral men, but they live without specific reference to God. Consequently, they are out of harmony with themselves and with the universe about them. They lack integration. These are practical atheists. They leave God out of their thoughts, their love, their lives. The happy and successful man does not casually fall in with their thought patterns.

The *hattaism* ('sinners') are those who fall short of the divine standard, open violators of the law, immoral men. *Hatta'im* is derived from the verb *hattah*, 'miss the mark or way'. The happy and successful man does not come under the influence of the habitual offenders of God's law to the extent that he adopts their life practices.

The *letsim* ('scoffers') are the cynics, those who openly mock at religion, at truth, at God. They know the price of everything and the value of nothing. It is interesting to note that the English word 'cynic' is based on the Greek word for 'dog'. The *letsim* are these who sit on the sidepaths and snap and snarl. The happy and successful man shuns the cynics' club.

The three-fold parallelism of v. 1 presents a graphic picture of the tragic progression of sin downward. Very clearly are we made to see the successive steps in a career of evil and the horrible

climax toward which they inevitably lead. Sin has a tremendous cumulative power!

The Psalmist's primary purpose in using the parallelism, however, is to emphasize 'the godly man's entire avoidance of association with evil and evil-doers in every form and degree'. The man who achieves true happiness and prosperity leaves sin off completely. He does not so much as begin the downward course.

2. *What he chooses* (v. 2).

The Psalmist knew quite well that life cannot be safely built on negations. There must be some great *positives*. Accordingly, he hastens to state that the man who is happy and successful in the highest sense not only avoids sin, but also chooses the will of God as his supreme good. 'But in the law of Jehovah is his delight, and in his law he meditates (soliloquizes) by day and night'. *Torah* ('law'), literally rendered, is 'instruction, teaching'. Here the reference is to the revealed will of God insofar as it had been made known. *Hephets* ('delight') signifies delighted attention, at the heart of which is deep longing, *Yehgeh* is a frequentative imperfect, denoting what the individual who is being described does habitually. The form is derived from *hagah*, 'mutter, murmur, speak in a low voice'. The figure is that of the quiet soliloquy of the oriental. Perhaps you have sat in blissful solitude in some hallowed spot and read aloud very softly some favourite Scripture as you let the voice of God speak to your soul. That is the picture here. It is a picture of deep desire for, genuine delight in, and utter devotion to the revealed will of God. As for the happy and successful man, the will of God is his world, and truth is his home!

3. *What he is like* (v. 3).

In v. 3 the Psalmist describes emblematically some of the results in the life of the individual in devotion to the will of God as the supreme good. 'Therefore (law of consequence), he becomes like a tree . . .' The tree which the Psalmist has in mind

most probably is the palm. It is an evergreen, loves the water, reaches a stately growth, and bears valuable fruit. What are the principal ideas set forth under this beautiful image?

First, the life that is lived in devotion to the will of God is characterized by *stability*. 'Consequently, he becomes like a tree planted. . . .' *Shatal* is not the ordinary word for plant. It suggests fixity. Perhaps it should be rendered 'firmly planted'. The life that finds in the will of God its central joy is a life that is deeply rooted. When the storms come it stands.

Moreover, the life that is lived in devotion to the will of God has constant access to an inexhaustible supply of unseen resources. *Plage* ('streams') is a plural noun. It comes from *palag*, 'split, divide.' The meaning of *palge* is 'dividings; then, channels, streams.' The exact force of the plural here is uncertain. The allusion may be to the place where two brooks or irrigation channels come together. At such a spot the soil is moist and fertile and for this reason there is ever present a patch of green grass, even when the vegetation of the surrounding countryside is burnt brown by the parching heat. The life that sends its roots deep into God's will feeds on a never-failing supply of grace and strength.

Further, the life that is lived in devotion to the will of God bears fruit in season. 'He becomes like a tree firmly planted upon the channels of water, which gives forth its fruit in its time'. Seasonable fruit is the glory of fruit-bearing trees. If a life is committed to the will of God, neither God nor man will be disappointed in the time of harvest.

Also, the life that is lived in devotion to the will of God possesses a haunting beauty. 'Its leaf also does not wither'. It is an *evergreen* life that speaks eloquently of God's abiding springtime.

Also, the life that is lived in devotion to the will of God has the power to see things through. 'All that he does he carries through to effective conclusion'. The figure of the tree has been dropped. *Yatsliah* is from a root which signifies to 'cleave, break through, push forward, finish happily, prosper'. In modern

language the word means to break through the goal and carry the ball for a touchdown. The man who avoids sin and chooses the will of God as his supreme delight has the power to see things through. He makes the goal.

II. *The Picture of the man whose life ends in abject Failure* (vv. 4-6). The second picture which the Psalmist sketches stands in emphatic contrast to the first. 'Not so the *ungodly* . . . the way of the ungodly loses itself in the desert'.

1. *What he does* (v. 4 a).

The words *lo'ken* ('not so') reverse all that has been said before. The ungodly man rejects the will of God. He chooses sin.

2. *What he is like* (vv. 4 b-5).

Because he chooses self-will in preference to the will of God the ungodly becomes like chaff—rootless, fruitless, worthless, at the mercy of every breeze that blows. It is difficult to conceive of a sharper antithesis than that which is drawn between the firmly planted tree and wind-driven chaff. 'Therefore' (because he is like chaff), the ungodly man cannot stand in the judgment. *Mishpat* does not refer primarily to the final judgment but to the *principle* of judgment which is continuously at work in human life. The Psalmist is thinking of every act of judgment whereby a righteous God separates between the righteous and the unrighteous and vindicates the right over against the wrong. When the testing time comes, the character of the man who lives without reference to God is made manifest. He is unable to stand.

3. *GOD makes the difference!* (v. 6).

'For GOD'—God is the supreme fact in life. He is the reason for the prospering of the one and the perishing of the other. 'God knows (watches, approves, directs) the way (course of life) of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly perishes'. The word translated 'perish' (*'avadh*) properly means to 'lose oneself, wander about'. A kindred word in Arabic signifies to lose oneself in the infinite, especially in the boundless desert. In

Job 6:18 '*avadh* is used of a path losing itself in the desert. Self-will beckons but to destroy.

The first Psalm affords a fascinating study in contrasts:

(1) Contrasted Choices. One man chooses sin. Another chooses the will of God.

(2) Contrasted Characters. The one becomes like a tree planted upon streams of water. The other becomes like wind-driven chaff, rootless, fruitless, worthless.

(3) Contrasted Courses. The path of the one loses itself in the trackless wastes of a godless oblivion. The path of the other leads to God who is LIFE and in whose presence are joys evermore.

CONFLICT AND COMFORT

W. GRIFFITH THOMAS, D.D.

'For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh; that their hearts may be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ'.—Col. 2:1, 2.

Although he was in prison the Apostle was constantly at work for his Master, and not least of all at the work of prayer. If ever the words *or are est laborare*, 'to pray is to labour', were true, they were true of Paul, for to him to pray was to work with all his might, as we shall see from a study of another of the prayers offered in his Roman prison.

1. What Prayer Means

Prayer is described as a *conflict*. We have a similar expression used of the prayers of Epaphras, in the words 'labouring fervently' (Col. 4:12). The same word 'conflict' is associated with faith, 'the good fight of faith' (1 Tim. 6:12), and with the 'good fight'