

**PSALMS — BOOK I***Study 1 of 9***Book I: Blessed Is the Man***Psalms 1:1 - 2:12***Key Passage**

*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; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. (Psalm 1:1-2, ESV)*

*I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you." (Psalm 2:7, ESV)*

**Introduction**

Psalms 1 and 2 were understood in ancient Jewish tradition to form a single gateway to the entire Psalter. Many early manuscripts and rabbinical texts treat them as a pair, and Acts 13:33 — where Paul quotes Psalm 2:7 and introduces it as part of "the first psalm" — supports the view that these two poems were originally read as one extended prologue. Together they form the doorway through which the reader is invited to enter the rest of the book.

Psalm 1 is a wisdom psalm. It addresses the individual: What kind of person are you? Where do you receive your counsel, and what do you love? It sets out two paths — the way of the righteous man who meditates on God's law, and the way of the wicked man who does not. The outcome of each path is clearly stated: flourishing on the one hand, perishing on the other.

Psalm 2 is a royal psalm — a psalm concerning the LORD's anointed King. It addresses the nations: Why do you rebel against God and His Christ? It presents the cosmic reality underneath all of human history —

that God has enthroned His Son on Zion, and that every authority on earth will either submit to Him or be broken. Read in light of the New Testament, its messianic weight is unmistakable.

Together, Psalm 1 and Psalm 2 answer two foundational questions that undergird all of Scripture: How shall a person live? and Who ultimately reigns? The Psalter begins not with a prayer or a lament, but with these two declarations about the shape of reality. Wisdom and sovereignty. The blessed man, and the anointed King. One is called to meditate on God's law; the other is God's own Son. These two figures — the obedient individual and the reigning Messiah — are the twin pillars on which the Psalter rests.

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## Psalm 1 — The Two Paths

### Verse 1 — Three Movements Downward

**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; (ESV)*

The psalm opens with a beatitude. The Hebrew word is אֲשֵׁרִי (ashrey), a plural noun form that carries the force of "O the happiness of..." or "How truly blessed is..." It is an exclamation about a quality of life rather than a sentiment or wish. The Septuagint renders it μακάριος (makarios) — the same word Jesus uses in the Beatitudes of Matthew 5. This is the first word of the entire Psalter, and it announces that the book is concerned, from its very opening line, with what makes for genuine human flourishing.

What follows is a carefully constructed negative portrait — not a description of open wickedness, but of a threefold movement in which a person's association with the ungodly deepens step by step. Three verbs trace the descent:

הלך (*halak*) — to walk — casual movement; receiving direction and counsel from those who exclude God from their thinking

עמד (*amad*) — to stand — a more settled, prolonged posture; lingering in the road the sinner habitually travels

ישב (*yashab*) — to sit — to dwell, to take up residence; full integration into a community defined by scorn for God

Three social categories are also identified: the wicked (רשעים, *resha'im* — those who are morally corrupt at root), sinners (חטאים, *chatta'im* — those who habitually miss the mark), and scoffers (לצים, *letsim* — those who make mockery of what is holy). These are not simply people who make mistakes; they represent an orientation of life turned away from God.

The structure is not accidental. The person who begins by merely listening to wrong counsel ends by sitting permanently in the assembly of those who mock. The psalm's first verse is a pastoral warning about the incremental nature of spiritual drift.

## Verse 2 — Delight and Meditation

**Psalm 1:2** *But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. (ESV)*

The contrastive conjunction (כי אם, *ki im* — "but rather") makes the shift decisive. The blessed man is not defined primarily by what he avoids but by what he loves. Two words carry the theological weight of this verse:

חפץ (*chephets*) — delight, pleasure — not reluctant compliance but genuine desire. The man's inner orientation is toward God's law, not duty-bound adherence from outside.

הגה (*hagah*) — to meditate, to murmur — to speak quietly under the breath; to turn words over continuously. The same word is used of a lion growling over its prey (Isaiah 31:4) and of a dove cooing (Isaiah 38:14). It is not abstract contemplation but engaged, repetitive, almost physical rumination on the text.

The "law of the LORD" (תּוֹרַת יְהוָה, torat YHWH) is not merely the Mosaic code in a technical sense. It refers to God's revealed instruction — the whole of what God has said. The phrase places the blessed man in living relationship with the speaking God, not merely with a rulebook.

"Day and night" is a Hebrew merism — a pair of opposites that together indicate totality. The meditation does not pause. This does not demand that the man never sleep, but that his waking life is shaped end-to-end by what God has said. It is a picture of a person in whom Scripture has become the running background of thought.

### Verse 3 — The Fruitful Tree

**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. (ESV)*

The simile is precise and intentional. This is not a tree that happened to grow near water by accident but a tree that has been planted (שָׁתוּל, shatul) — deliberately placed. The passive voice implies an agent: God Himself has put this man where he is. The rootedness of the righteous is not self-generated.

The streams (פְּלִגֵּי מַיִם, palge-mayyim) are irrigation channels — not seasonal rain but a constant, channelled water supply. In an arid climate, this distinction was not lost on any ancient reader. The man rooted in God's Word has access to a source that does not dry up with the seasons.

The results follow naturally: fruit in its season (productivity is real but not forced — it comes in its proper time), a leaf that does not wither (outward vitality maintained even in dry seasons), and prosperity in all that he does. The Hebrew word for prospers here is צָלַח (tsalach), meaning to advance, to push forward, to break through. This is not a promise of material comfort in every circumstance; it is a description of a life that has direction and real effect — one that moves with God rather than against the grain of reality.

Jeremiah 17:7-8 is the clearest Old Testament parallel: the man who trusts in the LORD is described in almost identical imagery — a tree planted by water, whose roots extend to the stream, unafraid of heat or drought. The resonance confirms that this portrait in Psalm 1 is not unique to the Psalter but expresses a theme woven throughout Israel's wisdom and prophetic literature.

## Verses 4-5 — The Chaff

**Psalm 1:4-5** *The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; (ESV)*

The abruptness of verse 4 is deliberate. "The wicked are not so" (לֹא־כֵן (הַרְשָׁעִים) — in five Hebrew words, the entire image of the flourishing tree is overturned. No extended metaphor is offered for the wicked to match the tree; only a brief, devastating comparison: chaff.

Chaff is the dry, weightless husk separated from the grain in threshing. It has no root, no moisture, no weight, and no nutritional value. It cannot stand by itself — it is wholly at the mercy of the wind. In a culture that threshed grain outdoors on hilltops to catch the breeze, this image was immediate and unmistakable. The wicked man may appear impressive at certain seasons of life, but when the wind of God's judgment comes, there is nothing of substance in him to hold his ground.

Verse 5 moves from image to implication. The wicked will not stand (יָקוּם, yakum) in the judgment — they cannot hold their position when their lives are subjected to God's scrutiny. Nor will sinners have a place in the congregation of the righteous. These two clauses anticipate a final accounting, a separation that the psalm regards as certain and just. The word "therefore" (עַל־כֵּן, al-ken) indicates that this outcome follows necessarily from what they are — not from arbitrary divine decision but from the nature of chaff itself.

## Verse 6 — The Foundation

**Psalm 1:6** *for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish. (ESV)*

The psalm closes with its theological foundation. The two contrasting outcomes of verses 3 and 5 are explained here by a single, asymmetrical statement about God's knowledge.

"The LORD knows" (יְהוָה יָדַעַ, YHWH yodea) does not mean merely that God is intellectually aware of the righteous man's path. In Hebrew, "to know" (יָדַעַ, yada) consistently carries the weight of intimate relationship and personal care. God watches over the way of the righteous — He is present to it, engaged with it, guiding it. This is the same word used in Amos 3:2 when God says of Israel, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth" — meaning chosen, cared for, in covenant with.

The way of the wicked will perish (הַאֲבָדַ, to'bed — from אָבַדַ, abad, to be destroyed, to come to nothing). Critically, it is the way that perishes — the path itself leads to its own undoing. The wicked man is not singled out for divine cruelty; he has simply chosen a road whose destination is destruction. The psalm does not present this as tragic fate but as the logical consequence of a path built without God.

### **Theological Note: Psalm 1 and Deuteronomy 28-30**

The two-ways structure of Psalm 1 is rooted in the covenant framework of Deuteronomy, where Moses sets before Israel life and death, blessing and curse (Deut. 30:15-20). Psalm 1 translates this national covenant choice into the individual's daily life: every person, in every generation, stands at the same fork in the road. The Psalter thus begins by grounding personal piety in the fundamental structure of biblical covenant theology.

## Psalm 2 — The Enthroned Son

Psalm 2 is an entirely different type of literature from Psalm 1. Where Psalm 1 is intimate and pedagogical, Psalm 2 is dramatic and cosmic. It consists of four stanzas, each with its own voice, building to a climactic proclamation about the identity of God's anointed King and the ultimate folly of resisting Him.

### Stanza 1 — The Rebellion of the Nations (vv. 1-3)

**Psalm 2:1-3** *Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying, "Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us." (ESV)*

The psalm opens with a question of astonishment — not genuine puzzlement but rhetorical disbelief. Why do the nations (גוֹיִם, goyim) rage (רָגַשׁ, ragash — to roar, to conspire in tumult)? Why do the peoples (לְאֻמִּים, le'ummim) plot (הִגִּידָה, hagah — the same word used of meditation in Psalm 1:2) emptiness? The irony is precise: the nations meditate on vain revolt while the righteous man meditates on God's law.

The conspiracy is explicit: the kings and rulers of the earth coordinate their resistance against the LORD (יְהוָה) and His Anointed (מְשִׁיחֹו, meshicho — His Messiah). This is the first occurrence of the word Messiah in the Psalter. The political revolt of the nations against God's appointed ruler is not treated as surprising or powerful; it is treated as absurd — plotted against One who cannot be overturned.

Their stated goal is liberation: to throw off the restraints of God's rule. The New Testament applies this psalm directly to the conspiracy of Herod, Pontius Pilate, the Gentiles, and the people of Israel against Jesus (Acts 4:25-28) — identifying the crucifixion as the historical event to which verse 2 points.

## Stanza 2 — The Response of Heaven (vv. 4-6)

**Psalm 2:4-6** *He who sits in the heavens laughs; the LORD holds them in derision. Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, "As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill." (ESV)*

The scene shifts abruptly to heaven. While the nations convulse with coordinated rebellion, God laughs (יִשְׂחַק, yischak — the same root as Isaac's name, "laughter"). This is not cruel amusement but the laughter of absolute sovereignty. The One who holds the cosmos in being is not threatened by the posturing of earthly rulers.

The laughter turns to wrath. God speaks — and His speech terrifies them. But before any description of judgment, He makes His declaration: "I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill." The verb (נִסְכַּחְתִּי, nasakhti) means I have installed, I have consecrated, I have poured out — the language of anointing and establishment. It is a perfect tense: already done. The enthroning of the Son is not conditional on the nations' cooperation. Their rebellion changes nothing.

Zion is the theological mountain — the place where heaven and earth meet in Israel's worldview. To say that God's King reigns on Zion is to say that God's sovereign rule has taken up an address in human history.

## Stanza 3 — The Decree of the Son (vv. 7-9)

**Psalm 2:7-9** *I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." (ESV)*

The Anointed King now speaks in his own voice and recites the divine decree (צִוּוּ, choq — formal declaration, legally binding word) that defines his identity and commission. "You are my Son; today I have begotten you" is a statement of covenant relationship and royal appointment. In the

ancient Near East, the enthronement of a king was the moment he was declared to be in a father-son relationship with the deity. In Israel's context, this goes far deeper — the Davidic covenant of 2 Samuel 7:12–14 establishes this sonship as uniquely real and permanent: "I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son."

The New Testament quotes this verse at four critical moments: the baptism of Jesus (Matthew 3:17 alludes to it), the transfiguration, Paul's sermon in Acts 13:33 where he explicitly identifies the resurrection as the "today" of this begetting, and Hebrews 1:5 and 5:5. The early church understood that Jesus' resurrection was the ultimate fulfilment of this decree — the moment when the Son of God was declared with power (Romans 1:4).

The scope of the promise is universal: the nations and the ends of the earth as inheritance. The Son's rule is not regional or national — it is cosmic. The imagery of the rod of iron and dashed pottery is not primarily about cruelty but about irresistibility. The authority of this King cannot be successfully resisted; opposition will shatter against it. This image reappears in Revelation 2:27 and 19:15, applied to Christ in His final authority over all nations.

#### **Stanza 4 — The Warning and the Blessing (vv. 10-12)**

**Psalm 2:10-12** *Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him. (ESV)*

The psalm turns from proclamation to exhortation. The voice now addresses the very kings and rulers who were conspiring in verses 1–3. The invitation is stunning in its graciousness: rather than announcing their immediate destruction, the psalm calls them to wisdom. The same nations who raged against God's rule are invited to repent of it.

"Be wise" (הַשְּׂבִילִי, *haskilu* — from שָׂכַל, *sakal*, to act wisely, to have insight) and "be warned" (הִוָּסְרוּ, *hivvasru* — to receive instruction, to allow yourself to be disciplined). The call is to recognise reality and change posture accordingly. To serve the LORD with fear (יִרְאַה, *yir'ah*) and rejoice with trembling (רַעְדָה, *re'adah*) is not a contradiction — it is the biblical posture of those who understand both the greatness and the mercy of God.

"Kiss the Son" (נִשְׁקוּ בָר, *nashqu var* — the Aramaic word בַּר, *bar*, for son, appears here, adding both linguistic complexity and likely messianic emphasis) — to kiss the feet or hands of a king was the ancient gesture of submission and homage. The nations are called to submit to the Son, not from fear alone, but because He is the only safe refuge. Crucially, the warning is paired with a promise: "lest he be angry, and you perish in the way" — but then, immediately, the psalm closes with a new beatitude: "Blessed are all who take refuge in him."

The final word of Psalm 2 echoes the first word of Psalm 1. Both psalms end and begin with "Blessed" — אֲשֶׁר־י (ashrey). The gateway is complete. The individual who meditates on God's law and the nations who submit to God's Son arrive at the same destination: blessing. The Psalter thus opens with a double invitation — to the person, and to the world — both called to the same God, through the same posture of humble, trusting dependence.

### **Psalm 2 and Messianic Fulfilment**

Psalm 2 is the most frequently quoted psalm in the New Testament. Its vocabulary shapes the accounts of Jesus' baptism (Matthew 3:17), His transfiguration (Matthew 17:5), Paul's exposition of the resurrection (Acts 13:32-33), the letter to the Hebrews (1:5; 5:5), and the visions of Revelation (2:26-27; 12:5; 19:15; 19:19). It is not merely a psalm that was later applied to Jesus; it is a psalm written to describe the One who would fulfil the Davidic covenant at its ultimate, cosmic scale. Handel set verse 7 in *Messiah* for this reason — the church has always heard this psalm as speaking of Christ in

His identity, mission, and final authority.

## Key Themes

### **1. *The Two Ways – and the One Safe Refuge***

Psalm 1 presents two ways for the individual; Psalm 2 expands the same structure to the nations. In both psalms, the choice is the same: align with God or refuse Him. The outcome is the same: those who align flourish; those who refuse perish. Both psalms end with the word blessed (ashrey), and both define blessedness in terms of relationship with God — through His Word (Psalm 1) and through His Son (Psalm 2). The two psalms are not merely parallel; they are complementary halves of a complete picture of what it means to live under God's authority.

### **2. *The Sovereignty of God over Human History***

The laughter of God in Psalm 2:4 is one of the most theologically significant images in the Psalter. It asserts that no coalition of earthly powers — however coordinated, however determined — can alter the purposes of God. The nations plot in vain (Psalm 2:1); what they scheme against is already established. This sovereignty is not abstract; it is personal and specific: God has set His King on His holy hill. History is moving somewhere, under Someone's direction.

### **3. *The Messiah as the Fulcrum of Everything***

The introduction of the word Messiah (meshiach) in Psalm 2:2 — the first use of the title in the Psalter — signals that the entire book is not merely a collection of religious poetry but a sustained meditation pointing toward the anointed King. The Psalms look forward to One in whom both wisdom and sovereignty are perfectly united. Jesus is the man of Psalm 1 — the one who perfectly delighted in and meditated on the Father's word — and He is the Son of Psalm 2 — enthroned by the Father over all nations. Both figures converge in Him.

#### 4. *Meditating on Scripture as a Transforming Practice*

The practical emphasis of Psalm 1:2 deserves sustained attention in any study group. The word *hagah* — to murmur, to mutter — describes not a passive encounter with a text but an active, repeated, almost physical engagement with it. The image is of someone who cannot let the words go. The promise attached to this practice (verse 3) is not the reward of academic achievement but the organic fruitfulness of a person drawing continuously from the right source. This is not an optional devotional practice; the psalm presents it as the root cause of every difference between the two lives it describes.

## Cross-References

Reference	Connection
<b>Joshua 1:8</b>	God commands Joshua to meditate on the Torah day and night so that he may prosper — virtually identical language to Psalm 1:2-3, confirming this is covenant teaching, not individual piety alone.
<b>Deuteronomy 30:15-20</b>	Moses sets before Israel life and death, blessing and curse. Psalm 1 applies this covenant structure to the individual's daily orientation of heart.
<b>Jeremiah 17:7-8</b>	The man who trusts in the LORD is like a tree planted by water — the closest Old Testament parallel to the image in Psalm 1:3, reinforcing that this portrait is a consistent thread in Hebrew thought.
<b>2 Samuel 7:12-16</b>	The Davidic covenant: "I will be his father, and he shall be my son" — the historical basis for the decree of Psalm 2:7. The son-king relationship is rooted here.
<b>Acts 4:25-28</b>	The early church explicitly quotes Psalm 2:1-2 and identifies the conspiracy against Jesus as its fulfilment — Herod and Pilate as the "kings of the earth" who plotted against God's Anointed.
<b>Acts 13:32-33</b>	Paul quotes Psalm 2:7 in the context of the resurrection, identifying Jesus' raising from the dead as the moment of His formal installation as Son — the "today" of the decree.
<b>Hebrews 1:5; 5:5</b>	The writer to the Hebrews quotes Psalm 2:7 twice, establishing Christ's superiority to the angels and His appointment as High Priest on the basis of this divine decree.
<b>Revelation 19:15</b>	The returning Christ rules the nations with a rod of iron — the fulfilment of Psalm 2:9, now in full eschatological scale.

## Discussion Questions

Take time with each question. The goal is not rapid answers but honest engagement with what the text is actually claiming.

### Understanding the Text

1. Psalm 1:1 traces a progression: walks → stands → sits. What does each stage look like concretely in a person's life today? Have you seen this progression — in yourself or in someone you know?
2. The Hebrew word *hagah* (meditate) means to murmur or mutter a text to oneself repeatedly. How does this description change the way you think about what Bible meditation actually is? How is it different from simply reading?
3. Psalm 2 opens with the question "Why do the nations rage?" — and then answers it with the laughter of God. What does the laughter of God in verse 4 tell us about how He views the most powerful human resistance to His purposes?
4. Psalm 2:7 — "You are my Son; today I have begotten you" — is quoted four times in the New Testament. Look at Acts 13:33. What event does Paul identify as the "today" of this decree, and what does that tell us about the significance of the resurrection?

### Applying the Text

5. The fruitful tree in Psalm 1:3 is "planted" — deliberately placed beside streams. What practices or disciplines in your life function as being planted near God's Word? Are there any that need to be cultivated or restored?
6. Psalm 2:10-12 invites the rebellious kings to be wise, to submit, and to take refuge in the Son. In what areas of your own life do you find yourself resisting God's authority rather than

taking refuge in His Son?

7. Both psalms close with the word *ashrey* — blessed. Psalm 1 opens with it; Psalm 2 ends with it. How does the pairing of these two psalms together change or deepen your understanding of what genuine blessing looks like?

### Honest Examination

8. The chaff in Psalm 1:4 has no weight of its own — it goes wherever the wind blows. In which areas of your life do you feel most unstable or rootless? What does verse 2 suggest as the remedy?

9. Psalm 2 describes the nations plotting their liberation from God's rule — wanting to throw off His "cords and bonds." Are there any areas of your life where you have treated God's commands as restriction rather than as the path to flourishing?

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## Closing Application

Psalms 1 and 2 together ask two questions of every person who reads them: What are you meditating on? and Who is your king?

The first question is intensely practical. Every person meditates on something. The mind is never idle; it is always turning something over, always murmuring something to itself. The question is whether that something is the living Word of God or the accumulated counsel of a world that has not taken God into account. Psalm 1 is not asking for extraordinary religious devotion — it is asking for a daily, deliberate return to what God has actually said.

The second question is cosmic and personal at the same time. Psalm 2 describes the whole of human history as a contest over who reigns. The nations rage; God laughs; the Son is enthroned. And then — astonishingly

— the rebellious nations are invited to submit and take refuge. The offer of blessing is extended even to those who were conspiring against the King. That offer has never been withdrawn.

The person described in Psalm 1 — rooted, fruitful, unmoved by drought — is the person who has answered both questions rightly. They meditate on God's Word, and they have taken refuge in God's Son. These are not two separate acts of piety; they are two sides of the same life. The Psalter begins by placing this life before every reader as the thing that is most worth having — and the most genuinely, deeply blessed way to live in a world that God made, governs, and is bringing to His appointed end.

### **Memory Verses**

*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; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. (Psalm 1:1-2, ESV)*

*Blessed are all who take refuge in him. (Psalm 2:12b, ESV)*