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Book I (1 of 41); Torah-royal introduction (1 of 2)

Psalm 1.1-6

Torah Hymn of the Two Ways

Psalm 1, the first half of a two-part introduction to the Psalter, is a wisdom hymn, utilizing both the vocabulary and imagery of the ANE wisdom literature. Typical of its wisdom vocabulary, the psalm begins with the ‘blessed’ (’ăš-rê) person and ends with the one who is ‘destroyed’ (tō’bēd). The wisdom imagery, reminiscent of that frequently found in Judaism and its surrounding cultures, highlights two contrasting paths or “ways” that serve as a metaphor for fundamental life choices and their inevitable consequences. One of these paths, taken by the wise and righteous, ends in blessing; the other path, taken by the foolish and wicked, ends in destruction. So, in Psalm 1, the company of those taking the first way, characterized by their delight in God's Word, are pictured as stable trees flourishing by streams of water, constantly being nourished and consistently bearing fruit. The company of those taking the second way are pictured as chaff, driven away and being unable to stand in judgment before God and the company of his people.

Background Supporting their intentional pairing as an introduction, the first and second psalms are both anonymous, lacking the superscription “A Psalm of David” that is so dominant in the remainder of Book One (Psalms 3–41; the absence of superscriptions in Psalms 10 and 33 is explained by their linkage with their preceding psalm). The first and second psalms also share key words (the envelope structure of ‘blessed’ in 1.1 and 2.12; ‘way’ and ‘perish’ in 1.6 and 2.12) and a play on words (‘meditate’ and ‘plot’ in 1.2 and 2.1). Although Psalm 1 was likely composed at a time earlier than its compilation, perhaps as early as Solomon's reign, other works composed by wisdom teachers for didactic use in the Second Temple period exhibit similar language and themes.

Foreground *Genre and rhetoric:* In regard to its content and form, this is a wisdom-Torah hymn, comparable to Psalms 19 and 119. Hermann Gunkel classifies Psalm 1 as a didactic poem; Erhard Gerstenberger classifies it as a wisdom psalm or personal exhortation that was used as part of a synagogal liturgy. Based upon the presence of the opening ‘macarism’ (Heb., ’ašrê; Grk., μακάριος) some classify Psalm 1 as a ‘beatitude,’ rather than a prayer or a hymn, giving the entire Psalter a didactic intent and instructional orientation (cf. James L. Mays). Others view Psalms 1–2 as a two-part coronation liturgy.

The psalm's rhetoric compares with the Torah-based wisdom of Psalms 19 and 119. The psalm utilizes a universal, wisdom vocabulary (blessed, scoffers, meditate, way of righteous, way of wicked) combined with nature imagery (trees planted, chaff blown) to contrast the logical end of a process and the destiny of the righteous and the wicked. The key words, making all the difference in regard to one's destiny, are ‘delight’ and ‘meditate.’ Note that the first word of the psalm, ‘blessed’ (’ašrê), begins with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and the last word of the psalm, ‘perish’ (tō’bēd in the text), begins with the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

Composition and traditional use: During the Second Temple period, at some stage in the Psalter's compilation, this wisdom-Torah psalm was coupled with a royal-messianic psalm (Psalm 2) and placed as an introduction to a collection (e.g., 1–72, 1–89, 1–119, or 1–150). Close links between Torah psalms and royal psalms occur at other places in the Psalter (cf. Psalms 1–2, 18–19, 118–119). At one stage in the history of the Psalter, Psalms 1–119 may have reflected the complete collection, beginning and ending with Torah psalms.

In Deuteronomy, God set before the people a blessing for those who listened to the commandments and a curse for those who failed to listen, turning aside from the way... (Deu 11.26-32; 30.15-20). Jeremiah spoke the word of the LORD when he said, “Behold, I set before you the way of life and the way of death” (Jer 21.8). The Two Ways tradition is evident as well in the Qumran ‘Rule of the Community’ (1QS 3.13–4.26). Many contemporary NT commentators, viewing Jesus as a teacher of wisdom, find reflections of the Two Ways schema in the narrow vs. wide gates of the ‘Sermon on the Mount’ (Mt. 7.13-14) and find a similar influence upon Pauline and Johannine dualisms (spirit v. flesh; putting on v. putting off; light v. darkness).

Reflections of the Two Ways teaching may be found in the arrangement of the exhortations of ‘Didache 1.1–6.3’ and the ‘Epistle of Barnabas 19.1–12, 20.1–2.’ Jerome viewed Psalm 1 as the ‘Praefatio Spiritus Sancti’ — “the preface of the Holy Spirit” and the great door to the other psalms. As this psalm begins the Psalter, so Dante begins his Divine Comedy with the choice between the two ways: “Along the journey of our life half way, I found myself again in a dark wood wherein the straight road no longer lay.”

Content *Characters, themes, and structure:* The psalm's characters include the righteous, the wicked, and Yahweh. Typical of wisdom literature, the theme is the two ways. The psalm can be structured around the contrast between the way of the righteous (1-3) and the way of the wicked (4-6).

There are alternative views of the psalm's structure: (1) verse 6 can be viewed as a summarizing contrast; (2) verses 1-2, 3-4, and 5-6 can be viewed as three couplets; and (3) various symmetrical patterns (e.g., 1-2, 3a-b, 3c || 4a, 4b, and 5-6; 1-2, 3 || 4, 5). Regarding the psalm's anonymity, the traditional attribution of the psalm to Solomon in the First Temple period is based upon the similarities of language and content with the Proverbs; cf. also the closing of a possible earlier collection, 1–72, with “a psalm of Solomon” (also Ps 127). Generally speaking, psalms composed during the First Temple period deal with monarchical themes rather than wisdom themes.

Readings

The way of the righteous 1.1-3

אֲשֶׁר־יְהֵאֲשִׁיב

« the-person-«-'envious'
« ἀνήρ-«-Μακάριος

1.1a1

How blessed is the man ^{NASB}

blessed/envious ('šr) ... man (yš)

Μακάριος ἀνήρ, ^{LXX}

MT: 'ašrê-hā'îš — 'ašrê (blessed, envious desire) LXX: Μακάριος (μακάριος, adj-nms; blessed, fortunate) NRSV: Happy are those NIV11: Blessed is the one The assonance that begins here continues to the first word of following clause ('ašrê-hā'îš 'āšer). The congratulatory formula "Blessed..." is not berākā, but 'āš-rê. Mays distinguishes: "the blessing (berākā) invokes God's beneficent support of life, while the beatitude ('āš-rê) points to and commends the conduct and character that enjoy it." Goldingay translates "good fortune." The word 'āš-rê may form an inclusio with yašlīah (prospers) in verse 3; as the final word of Psalm 2, it invites the consideration of them together.

1.1a2

אֲשֶׁר־לֹא הִלְךָ בְּעֵצַת רְשָׁעִים

« wicked « in-advice/counsel-of « he-walks « not « who
ἀσεβῶν « ἐν-βουλή « ἐπορεύθη « ὅς οὐκwho does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, ^{NASB}

who ('šr) ... not walk (l' hlk) ... counsel ('sh) ... wicked (rš')

ὅς οὐκ ἐπορεύθη ἐν βουλή ἀσεβῶν ^{LXX}

MT: 'āšer lō' hālak ba'āšat rēšā'im — hālak (qal-pf-3ms, hlk; to go) LXX: ἐπορεύθη (API-3s, πορεύουσα; to make, go) NRSV: who do not follow the advice of the wicked, NIV11: who does not walk in step with the wicked NETS: who did not walk by the counsel of the impious, Completive parallelism allows for both unity and progression of thought in the threefold characterization of those from whom the righteous should be separated. The perfect tenses picture others having made decisions (they walk, stand, and sit) and the repeated lō marks the absolute rejection of their course. Goldingay labels these the "faithless." For 'walk,' Dahood translates "not entered."

1.1a3

וּבְדַרְכֵיךָ חַטָּאִים לֹא עָמַד

^ he-stands « not « sinners « and-in-way-of
ἔστη « οὐκ « ἀμαρτωλῶν « καὶ-ἐν-ὁδῶNor stand in the path of sinners, ^{NASB}

not stand (l' 'md) ... path (drk) ... sinners (hṭ')

καὶ ἐν ὁδῶ ἀμαρτωλῶν οὐκ ἔστη, ^{LXX}

MT: ūbēdereḵ ḥattā'im lō' āmād — āmād (qal-pf-3ms, 'md; to stand) LXX: ἔστη (AAI-3s, ἵστημι; to stand, make stand) NRSV: or take the path that sinners tread, NIV11: or stand in the way that sinners take For 'sinners,' Goldingay has "failures." Dahood reads "assembly" for 'path.'

1.1b

וּבְמוֹשָׁב לִצְיִים לֹא יָשָׁב

| he-sits « not « scoffers/mockers « and-in-seat-of
ἐκάθισεν « οὐκ « λοιμῶν « καὶ-ἐπι-καθέδρανNor sit in the seat of scoffers! ^{NASB}

not sit (l' yšb) ... seat/residence (mwšb) ... scoffers (lš)

καὶ ἐπὶ καθέδραν λοιμῶν οὐκ ἐκάθισεν, ^{LXX}

MT: ūbēmōšab lēšim lō' yāšāb — lēšim (qal-ptc-mp, lš; one scoffing); yāšāb (qal-pf-3ms, yšb; to sit, reside) LXX: ἐκάθισεν (AAI-3s, καθίζω; to sit); λοιμῶν (λοιμός, n-gmp; diseased persons) NIV11: or sit in the company of mockers, NETS: and on the seat of pestiferous people did not sit down. Kraus: "circle of scoffers."

1.2a

כִּי אֵם בְּתוֹרַת יְהוָה הִפְצֹו

« delight-him « 'YHWH' « in-'Torah'-of « if « rather
τὸ-θέλημα-αὐτοῦ « κυρίου « ἐν-τῶ-νόμῳ « ἢ « ἀλλBut his delight is in the law of the Lord, ^{NASB}

delight (hps) ... 'in Torah of YHWH' (b twrh yhw)

ἀλλ ἢ ἐν τῶ νόμῳ κυρίου τὸ θέλημα αὐτοῦ, ^{LXX}

MT: kī 'im bētōrat yhw hēpšō — LXX: τὸ-θέλημα (will; n-nms) GW: Rather, he delights in the teachings of the Lord Gold.: "Rather, his pleasure lies in Yhw's teaching" (i.e., in the law, the prophets, and, especially, the psalms themselves). For 'law,' others translate 'instruction' (cf. Kraus; McCann), often emphasizing that this is the essential nature of the psalms themselves, especially as presented in their final, canonical shape.

1.2b

וּבְתוֹרָתוֹ יְהוָה יוֹמָם וּלְיָלָה

| and-night « day « he-meditates « and-on-'Torah'-him
καὶ-νυκτός « ἡμέρας « μελετήσει « καὶ-ἐν-τῶ-νόμῳ-αὐτοῦAnd in His law he meditates day and night. ^{NASB}

in his 'Torah' (b twrh) he meditates (hgh)

καὶ ἐν τῶ νόμῳ αὐτοῦ μελετήσει ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτός. ^{LXX}

MT: ūbētōrātō yehge yōmām wālayēlā — yehge (qal-impf-3ms, hgh; to meditate, muse) LXX: μελετήσει (FAI-3s, μελέτω; to meditate, muse, study) GW: and reflects on his teachings day and night. Gold.: "he talks about his teaching day and night." Dahood: "from his law he recites..."

וְהָיָה כֶּעֵץ

« like-a-tree « and-he-is
« ὤς-τὸ-ξύλον « καὶ-ἔσται

1.3a1

He will be like a tree ^{NASB}

tree (ʿš)

καὶ ἔσται ὡς τὸ ξύλον ^{LXX}

MT: wəhāyā kēʿēš — wəhāyā (vc-qa1-pf-3ms, w hyh; to be) LXX: καὶ-ἔσται (FMI-3s, εἰμί; to be, exist, happen) NIV84: He is like a tree NIV11: That person is like a tree Gold.: "he becomes like...."

שָׁתוּל עַל-פְּלִי מַיִם

« water « streams-of-«-by « planted/established
τῶν-ὕδατων « τὰς-διεξόδους-«-παρὰ « τὸ-πεφυτευμένον

1.3a2

planted by streams of water, ^{NASB}

planted/established (štl) ... streams of water (plg mym)

τὸ πεφυτευμένον παρὰ τὰς διεξόδους τῶν ὑδάτων, ^{LXX}

MT: šātūl ʿal-palgē māyim — šātūl (qa1-ps-ptc-nms, štl; one planted) LXX: τὸ-πεφυτευμένον (PjM/PPTc-nns, φυτεύω; one planted) NRSV: firmly planted by streams of water, NETS: that was planted by the channels of waters, Dahood: "transplanted."

אֲשֶׁר פְּרִיּוֹ יִתֵּן בְּעִתּוֹ

« in-season-him « he-yields/gives « fruit-him « which
ἐν-καρπῷ-αὐτοῦ « δώσει « τὸν-καρπὸν-αὐτοῦ « ὃ

1.3a3

Which yields its fruit in its season ^{NASB}

yields (ntn) ... fruit (pry) ... season (ʿt)

ὃ τὸν καρπὸν αὐτοῦ δώσει ἐν καιρῷ αὐτοῦ ^{LXX}

MT: ʾāšer pīryō yittēn bēʿittō — yittēn (qa1-impf-3ms, ntn; to give); bēʿittō (ʿt, n-ms; in time, season) LXX: δώσει (FAI-3s, δίδωμι; to give); ἐν-καιρῷ (καιρός, n-dms; season)

וְעֵלְהוּ לֹא-יִבֹּל

^ he-whithers-«-not « and-leaves-him
ἀπορρηήσεται-«-οὐκ « καὶ-τὸ-φύλλον-αὐτοῦ

1.3a4

And its leaf does not wither; ^{NASB}

wither (nbl)

καὶ τὸ φύλλον αὐτοῦ οὐκ ἀπορρηήσεται, ^{LXX}

MT: wəʿālēhū lō-yibbōl — yibbōl (qa1-impf-3ms, nbl; to wither) LXX: ἀπορρηήσεται (FAI-3s, ἀπορρέω; to fall off)

וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר-יַעֲשֶׂה יִצְלִיחַ:

| he-prospers « he-does-«-that « and-all-of
κατευδοθήσεται « ποιῆ-«-ὄσα-ἂν « καὶ-πάντα

1.3b

And in whatever he does, he prospers. ^{NASB}

he prospers (šlh)

καὶ πάντα, ὅσα ἂν ποιῆ, κατευδοθήσεται. ^{LXX}

MT: wəkol ʾāšer-yaʿšē yašlīah — yaʿšē (qa1-impf-3ms, ʿšh; to do); yašlīah (hifil-impf-3ms, šlh; to prosper, succeed) LXX: ποιῆ (PASubj-3s, ποιέω; to do); κατευδοθήσεται (FPI-3s, κατευδοθῶ; to prosper) NRSV: In all that they do, they prosper. NIV84: Whatever he does prospers. Dahood: "whatever it produces is good." Psalm 112 develops the theme of prosperity.

The way of the wicked 1.4-6

לֹא-כֵן הִרְשָׁעִים

^ [so-«-not:LXX] the-wicked « so-«-not
οὕτως-«-οὐχ « οἰ-ἀσεβεῖς « οὕτως-«-οὐχ

1.4a

The wicked are not so, ^{NASB}

wicked (ršʿ)

οὐχ οὕτως οἰ ἀσεβεῖς, οὐχ οὕτως, ^{LXX}

MT: lō-kēn horšāʾim LXX: NIV84: Not so the wicked! (NIV84=NIV11) NETS: Not so the impious, not so! LXX repeats "not thus" for emphasis (or, dittography after the sigma). Kraus reflects this with "That is not the way of the wicked, "No." Again, "not so the-wicked-ones" uses lō, absolutely not. Gold.: "not so the faithless."

כִּי אִם-כֶּמֶץ

« like-chaff-«-if « but
« ὡς-ὁ-χνοῦς-«-ἢ « ἀλλ

1.4b1

But they are like chaff ^{NASB}

chaff (mws)

ἀλλ ἢ ὡς ὁ χνοῦς, ^{LXX}

MT: kī ʾim-kammōš LXX: χνοῦς (χνός, n-nms; chaff) NIV84: They are like chaff (NIV84=NIV11) GW: Instead, they are like husks that the wind blows away. NETS: Rather, they are like the dust Dahood: "like the winnowed chaff."

1.4b2

אֲשֶׁר־תִּדְּפֶנְנֵנּוּ רִיחַ:

| wind « she-scatters-him-«-that

της-γης « από-προσώπου « ὁ-άνεμος « ἐκριπτεῖ-«-ὄν

which the wind drives away. ^{NASB}

wind (rwh) ... drives away/scatters abroad (ndp)

ὄν ἐκριπτεῖ ὁ ἄνεμος ἀπὸ προσώπου τῆς γῆς. ^{LXX}

MT: 'āšer-tiddēpennū rūah — tiddēpennū (qal-impf-3fs, ndp; to scatter, drive away) LXX: ἐκριπτεῖ (ἐκριπτω, PAI-3s; to spread abroad) NIV84: that the wind blows away. (NIV84=NIV11)

1.5a

עַל־כֵּן לֹא־יִקְמוּ רְשָׁעִים בַּמִּשְׁפָּט

^ in-the-judgment « wicked « they-will-stand-«-not « thus-«-therefore

έν-κρίσει « άσεβεῖς « άναστήσονται-«-ούκ « διὰ-τοῦτο

Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, ^{NASB}

wicked (rš') ... judgment (mšpt)

διὰ τοῦτο οὐκ ἀναστήσονται άσεβεῖς έν κρίσει ^{LXX}

MT: 'al-kēn lō'-yāqumū rēšā'im bammišpāt — yāqumū (qal-impf-3mp, qm; to stand, rise up) LXX: ἀναστήσονται (ἀνίστημι, FMI-3p; to stand up) NETS: Therefore the impious will not rise up in judgment, Gold.: "Thus the faithless do not stand in the judgment" (at the End or at the city gate).

1.5b

וְחַטָּאִים בְּעֵדַת צְדִיקִים:

| 'righteous' « in-assembly/congregation-of « and-sinners

δικαίων « έν-βουλῆ « οὐδὲ-ἀμαρτωλοῖ

Nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. ^{NASB}

sinners (hṭ') ... assembly ('dh) ... righteous (šdyq)

οὐδὲ ἀμαρτωλοῖ έν βουλῆ δικαίων, ^{LXX}

MT: wəḥaṭṭā'im ba'ādat šaddiqim — ba'ādat (in assembly, in congregation) LXX: έν-βουλῆ (έν-βουλῆ, n-dfs; in council) NRSV: nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; Gold.: "nor the failures...." For 'congregation,' cf. also Dahood and Kraus.

1.6a

כִּי־יֹדַעַ יְהוָה דְּרֹךְ צְדִיקִים

^ 'righteous' « way-of « 'YHWH' « knows/watches-over-«-for

δικαίων « ὁδὸν « κύριος « γινώσκει-«-ὄτι

For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, ^{NASB}

'YHWH' knows (yd') ... way (drk) ... righteous (šdyq)

ὄτι γινώσκει κύριος ὁδὸν δικαίων, ^{LXX}

MT: kī-yōdēa' yhw derek šaddiqim — yōdēa (qal-ptc-ms, yd'; to know, watch over, recognize) LXX: γινώσκει (γινώσκω, PAI-3s; to know) NRSV: for the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, NIV84: For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, (NIV84=NIV11) Dahood: "But Yahweh shall safekeep the assembly of the just" (with Heb. yd' connoting "to care for, protect").

1.6b

וְדֶרֶךְ רְשָׁעִים תֵּאבֵד:

| she-will-perish « wicked « but-way-of

ἀπολείται « άσεβῶν « καὶ-ὁδὸς

But the way of the wicked will perish. ^{NASB}

way (drk) ... wicked (rš') ... perish ('bd)

καὶ ὁδὸς άσεβῶν ἀπολείται. ^{LXX}

MT: wəderek rēšā'im tō'bēd — tō'bēd (qal-impf-3fs, 'bd; to perish, be destroyed) LXX: ἀπολείται (ἀπόλλυμι, FMI-3s; to perish) NIV11: but the way of the wicked leads to destruction. GW: but the way of wicked people will end. Possible inclusio, drk rš' with verse 1, drk hṭ'. Perhaps to emphasize its contrast with the psalm's opening word ('ašrē), the last word of the psalm begins with the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet (tō'bēd).

BcR