

are any of these factors unknown to Dahood. They simply provide a controlled perspective within which comparative studies may be conducted: they are a constant reminder of the necessity for caution. From the perspective of the writer of this commentary, they provide an indication as to why it is that there has so often been disagreement with the suggestions or hypotheses of Mitchell Dahood. But it must also be acknowledged again that Dahood is immensely provocative and has numerous brilliant insights; without scholars of his caliber, there would be little or no progress. Any critical comments in this commentary should be perceived within this larger perspective of gratitude.

For examples of the critical treatment of the use of the Ugaritic texts in the study of the Psalms, the reader is referred to the indexes of Ugaritic texts at the end of this volume. Examples illustrating a critical appraisal of the use of Ugaritic in matters pertaining to comparative lexicography may be found by consulting the Index of Key Ugaritic Terms, also at the end of this volume.

BOOK I: PSALMS 1-41

An Introductory Psalm of Wisdom (1:1-6)

Bibliography

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Translation

- ¹ Blessed the man who has not walked by the counsel^a of the wicked,
and has not stood in the way^b of the sinful,
and has not sat in the gathering^c of scoffers.^d
- ² But in the Lord's Torah is his delight
and in his Torah will he muse^a by day and night.
- ³ So shall he be like a tree,
transplanted by running waters,^a
which shall yield its fruit in its season,
and its foliage shall not wither.
So, in all that he shall do, he shall prosper.^b
- ⁴ Not so the wicked!
But they are like the chaff that wind tosses.^a
- ⁵ Therefore, the wicked shall not rise up in judgment,^a
nor sinners in an assembly of the righteous.
- ⁶ For the Lord protects^a the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked shall perish.

Notes

1.a. ׀ע׀ץ, "counsel," in S, is transposed with ׀דד "way" in v 1c; though such a change might be viewed as an improvement in the sequence of thought, it is unnecessary. The word ׀ע׀ץ can mean either "counsel" or "council"; Dahood translates "council" in this context (*Psalms I*, 1-2). A similar alternative is the translation "fellowship" (of wicked men), on the basis of the use of the term in the Qumran literature, as proposed by Bergmeier, *ZAW* 79 (1967) 229-32. Both alternatives are possible, though it is a question of judgment rather than semantics and depends upon the translation of the rest of v 1; see notes b and c below.

1.b. ׀דד "way." Dahood (*Psalms I*, 2) translates ׀דד by "assembly," basing his translation upon a supposed usage of the cognate term in the Ugaritic texts. The word is used again (in v 6, twice) and thus is critical to the meaning of the psalm as a whole. According to Dahood,

the Ugaritic word *drkt*, which means “dominion, power,” and hence “throne” (see Aistleitner, *WUS* #792), undergoes a semantic shift from “dominion” to the place where dominion is exercised, namely the “assembly.” But the argument is weak. Within Ugaritic, there is precisely such a semantic shift, but it is from “dominion” to “throne” (namely, the seat of dominion). The use of the term in Ugaritic may designate the dominion of the deities; Anat, for example, is called *bʿlt.drkt*, “mistress of dominion” (RS.24.252.7). No doubt the Ugaritic nuance of *drkt* (“dominion, power”) does occur in the OT in the Hebrew usage of the root דָּרַךְ (see Judg 5:21 and P. C. Craigie, *JBL* 88 [1969] 257). In the present context, however, the argument for the meaning “assembly,” insofar as it is based on Ugaritic, is without firm foundation. “Throne” would be a possible translation, though it would not fit the poetic context well. Furthermore, the contrasting of two ways (1:6) is a common theme in both biblical literature (Deut 30:19; Jer 21:8; Prov 1:1-7; Matt 7:13-14) and in Near Eastern texts: e.g. in Gilgamesh X.vi (*ANET*, 93) and the “Hymn to Aten” (*ANET*, 371). In summary, it is better to retain the translation “way” for Heb דָּרַךְ , both here and in v 6.

1.c. “Gathering” (קָוָה) or “seat”; on the meaning of the term, see Rinaldi in *BeO* 17 (1975) 120. The sense of this word could admittedly add to the strength of Dahood’s argument (note b), in that it would provide synonymous parallelism for the first three lines as follows: “council//assembly//gathering (session).” Nevertheless, the more conventional rendering shows a progression within the parallelism. Just as the verbs demonstrate a kind of progression (or regression): “walked//stood//sat,” so too do the nouns: “counsel//way//gathering.”

1.d. The verb דָּבַר has the basic sense “to talk loosely,” and the noun דָּבָר has the sense “babbling”; but the context here suggests the nuance “scoffers.” cf. H. N. Richardson, “Some Notes on דָּבַר and Its Derivatives.” *VT* 5 (1955) 163-79.

2.a. The root נָחַן , which may be onomatopoeic, implies more than just “meditating”; some kind of utterance is indicated, such as “murmuring” or “whispering.”

3.a. “Running waters”; viz. “irrigation channels,” fed with a constant supply of water.

3.b. The syntax is ambivalent, and the line could refer to the *tree*. But the line is best taken as referring to the righteous man and as concluding the first section (vv 1-3); it is thus unnecessary to delete the line as a gloss (as suggested in *BHS*).

4.a. *G* adds *ἀπὸ προσώπου τῆς γῆς* (“... from the face of the earth”). The words may have been added simply for stylistic reasons, to avoid the abruptness of MT, which is nevertheless the best text.

5.a. “In judgment” implies the *place* of judgment (cf. Deut 25:1); i.e. the wicked will have no place, or no respect, in the courts of law, where justice and righteousness are the *modus operandi*. Such a meaning is strongly implied by the second line of the synonymous parallelism (v 5b). If this interpretation is correct, then there is not any eschatological implication of a final judgment here.

6.a. “Protects”: the normal sense of the verb שָׁמַר is “to know”; on the sense “protect, guard,” see Dahood, *Psalms I*, 5.

Form/Structure/Setting

Psalm 1, by virtue of its language and content, must be classified with the *wisdom psalms* (cf. Pss 32, 34, and 49 in this volume). Its terminology and teaching reflect the thought of the Wisdom Literature in general and the Book of Proverbs in particular (cf. Prov 2:12-15, 20-22). The psalm was probably not composed in the first instance for use in formal worship; rather, it must be viewed as a literary and poetic composition, expressing with remarkable clarity the polarity of persons and their destinies.

There are certain basic problems pertaining to the analysis of the psalm in terms of poetry, particularly with respect to meter. While the analysis of meter is always difficult in the study of Hebrew poetry (see the critical remarks in the INTRODUCTION), there is even less regularity than usual in Ps 1. The interpretation of most scholars has proceeded on the basis of a provisional metrical analysis (e.g. Gunkel, *Die Psalmen*, 1-4), but it has been claimed by

Bullough that the psalm is not metrical at all, but is “plain rhythmic prose” (*VT* 17 [1967] 42-49). For a critical analysis of the problem of meter, see O. Loretz, *UF* 3 (1971) 101-3. The translation above has not included a metrical notation (as is done for other psalms in this commentary). Bullough is probably correct in his view that the psalm is not metrical in the normal sense; the only approximate indicator of balance is the division of lines, which are very uneven in length. But although there is not a normal metrical structure to Ps 1, it is still clearly and distinctively *poetry*. Parallelism is used in vv 1, 2, 3c-d, 5, and 6. And the psalm as a whole is a finely crafted piece of poetic literature, as various recent studies have shown. Merendino has shown that the psalm is a work of art (*Kunstwerk*), and Lack’s structural analysis has shown the closely knit structure of the whole—the text is a “tissue of interdependencies” (*Bib* 57 [1976] 167).

The structure of the psalm may be set forth as follows: (1) the solid foundation of the righteous (1:1-3); (2) the impermanence of the wicked (1:4-5); (3) a contrast of the righteous and the wicked (1:6). Within this overall structure the poet has made careful use of chiasmus in the first two sections:

vv 1-2	A
v 3	B
v 4	B'
v 5	A'

On this chiasmic structure, see further N. H. Ridderbos, *Die Psalmen*, 120 and R. L. Alden, *JETS* 17 (1974) 11-28. The inner chiasmus between the first two parts of the psalm is then united in the contrast of the antithetical parallelism in v 6, which also has an internal chiasmic structure.

Psalm 1, as a didactic poem, does not in the first instance have a cultic or social setting; its primary setting is literary, for it forms an introduction to the Psalter as a whole and has been placed in its present position by the editor or compiler of the Psalter for that purpose. But although the psalm is a distinct and independent literary composition, there is some evidence, in both the early Jewish and Christian traditions, to suggest that it was joined to Ps 2, and the two psalms together were considered to be the first psalm of the Psalter. In the Jewish tradition, Rabbi Johanan is credited with the following words in the Babylonian Talmud: “Every chapter that was particularly dear to David he commenced with ‘Happy’ and terminated with ‘Happy.’ He began with ‘Happy,’ as it is written, ‘Happy is the man,’ and he terminated with ‘Happy,’ as it is written, ‘Happy are all they that take refuge in him.’” (*Ber.* 9b). The reference here to the first verse of Ps 1 and the last verse of Ps 2 indicates that the two psalms together were considered to be a literary unit.

The evidence from the early Christian tradition is found in Acts 13:33. The writer, Luke, gives a quotation from Ps 2:7, but introduces it as coming from the first psalm; the corrections, both in the early Greek text and in modern English versions, to read “the second psalm,” are appropriate given the change in the conventional system of numbering the Psalms. Nevertheless, the oldest Greek text of Acts provides evidence for the early Christian view

that the first two psalms were considered to be a single unit. If the two psalms were first joined in the Psalter (despite being independent compositions prior to their incorporation in the Book of Psalms), it may be that they were intended to provide a double perspective in introduction; Ps 1 provides an introduction from the perspective of wisdom, whereas Ps 2 provides a prophetic approach to the book. It has also been suggested that the two psalms were joined together to form a coronation liturgy, perhaps for one of the last kings of Judah; the king, at his coronation, pledged himself to fulfill the Deuteronomic law of kings (W. H. Brownlee, *Bib* 52 [1971] 321-36).

Comment

The solid foundation of the righteous (1:1-3). The righteous are introduced as the "blessed" or "happy" (see further H. Cazelles, *TDOT* I, 445-48). Their happy estate is not something given automatically by God, but is a direct result of their activity. A person can be happy, from a negative perspective, by avoiding the advice, the life style and the assembly of wicked persons (v 1). The three parallel lines of v 1 are poetically synonymous and thus all describe in slightly different ways the evil company which should be avoided by the righteous. Though the three lines, taken together, provide a full picture of what is to be avoided, it would be stretching the text beyond its natural meaning to see in these lines three distinct phases in the deterioration of a person's conduct and character (see further G. W. Anderson, *VT* 24 [1974] 231-33). The righteous person avoids all the dimensions of the way of the wicked; therein lies the source of blessedness or happiness.

But a person who is to be happy must also engage in a positive task, which is identified in v 2 as being related to the Torah. Although the term *Torah* can be used of the law, or of the Pentateuch, or even (at a later date) of the whole OT, its significance here is the most fundamental one. Basically, the word *Torah* means "instruction"; specifically, it is the instruction which God gives to mankind as a guide for life. Thus it may include that which is technically law, but it also includes other more general parts of God's revelation. The Torah is to be a source of "delight" (see further the *Explanation*, below), a delight which is discovered by means of constant meditation on its meaning. Just as the king would learn to live a life of humility and righteousness through constant reflection on the meaning of Torah (Deut 17:18-20), so too could all mankind. And an understanding of Torah contributed to long life, peace and prosperity (Prov 3:1-2), for in its words God has set down the nature of a life which would reach the true fulfillment for which it was created.

The happy estate of the righteous is illuminated in v 3 by the simile of the tree. A tree may flourish or fade, depending upon its location and access to water. A tree transplanted from some dry spot (e.g. a wadi, where the water runs only sporadically in the rainy season) to a location beside an irrigation channel, where water never ceases to flow, would inevitably flourish. It would become a green and fruitful tree. The simile not only illustrates colorfully the prosperity of the righteous, but also make a theological point.

The state of blessedness or happiness is not a *reward*; rather, it is the result of a particular type of life. Just as a tree with a constant water supply *naturally* flourishes, so too the person who avoids evil and delights in Torah *naturally* prospers, for such a person is living within the guidelines set down by the Creator. Thus the prosperity of the righteous reflects the wisdom of a life lived according to the plan of the Giver of all life.

The wicked (1:4-5). "Not so the wicked" (v 4); that is, they shall not prosper as the righteous (v 3). The life of the wicked is summarized succinctly in the brief simile of v 4b. They are like chaff. The language reflects the practice of winnowing grain at harvest time. The grain would be tossed into the air with a pitchfork at the village threshing floor; the wind would separate the light chaff and husks and blow them away, while the more substantial grain fell back to the floor. Chaff is something light and useless, part of the crop, but a part to be disposed of by the farmer. The wicked are thus depicted in the simile as lightweight, persons without real substance or worth.

The "lightness" of the wicked is then elaborated in v 5. The two lines of v 5, in synonymous parallelism, reflect essentially the same thought, namely that the wicked hold no weight or influence in the important areas of human society. Where the righteous meet for the pursuit of justice and government, the wicked have no place and are not recognized. They live for themselves and cannot participate in the affairs of those who live for others and for righteousness.

The contrast (1:6). And so, in the last resort, human beings are of two kinds. They may be righteous; if so, God protects their way. But they may be wicked, and for the wicked, the final destiny is doom. The doom of the wicked, as it is expressed in this psalm, is not primarily a punishment, any more than the happiness of the righteous is a reward. Each is presented as the natural outcome of a way of life which has been chosen.

Explanation

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Prov 1:7); these words are often taken to be an expression of the fundamental principle of the Wisdom Literature, of which this psalm is a part. Psalm 1 elaborates upon this principle with respect to human behavior. The righteous person is the one whose "fear" (or reverence) of God affects his daily living; he avoids evil and learns how to live from God's Torah, and therein lies his wisdom. The wisdom, as expressed in this psalm, is essentially related to the present life; the psalm does not clearly evince any doctrine of future life (as proposed, for example, by Dahood in *Psalms* I, 3-5). The anticipated prosperity is in the present life, just as the failure of the wicked is to be a present reality.

The contrast between the two *ways* (1:6) is illuminated further in the words of Jesus in the "Sermon on the Mount" (Matt 7:13-14). Jesus speaks of two gates, a broad gate giving entrance to the "way that leads to destruction" and a narrow gate giving entrance to "the way that leads to life." (Alternatively, the text could be interpreted to mean that there are two *ways*, one leading to a broad gate, the other leading to a narrow gate). The principles of Jesus' teaching are essentially those of the psalm, yet there is an eschatological

element in the words of Jesus (see also Luke 13:24), for the kingdom of God, represented by the way of life associated with the narrow gate, has both a present and a future dimension of reality.

There is a further aspect of this psalm which is relevant to its application. In the last resort, the principal wisdom of the psalm can be reduced to v 2; the prosperity and happiness of the righteous depends upon their finding "delight" in the Lord's Torah. But how is such delight to be found? In practical terms, it is achieved by constant meditation upon the Torah (v 2b), which is God's *instruction*. As instruction, it contains guidance from the Creator as to the meaning of creation. Life is lived in futility if its fundamental purpose is never discovered. It is the meaning of human existence which is enshrined in the Torah, and it is the discovery of that meaning which flows from meditation upon Torah.

A Coronation Psalm (2:1-12)

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Translation

- 1 *Why do the nations congregate in commotion* (3+3)
and why^a do the warriors^b murmur murderously?^c
- 2 *Why do earthly kings take their stand* (3+3+2)
and why do princes join together as one,
against the Lord and his anointed?
- 3 "Let us tear off their fetters (3+3)
and let us cast off their cords^a from us!"
- 4 *The Enthroned One laughs in heaven;* (3+3)
the Lord mocks them.
- 5 *Then he addresses them^a in his anger* (3?+2)
and in his wrath he terrifies them.^b
- 6 "I have installed^a my king (3+2?)
upon Zion, my holy mountain!"

- 7 "I will tell of the Lord's decree. (4, 4+3)
He said to me: 'You are my son.
Today, I have begotten you.
- 8 Just ask me, (2+3+3)
and I will grant nations as your inheritance
and as your possession, the ends of the earth.
- 9 You shall break them^a with an iron rod; (3+3)
like a potter's vessel you shall pulverize them.' "
- 10 So now, O kings, think carefully! (3+3)
Be admonished, O earthly rulers!
- 11 Serve the Lord with fear (3+2)
and rejoice with trembling.
- 12 Kiss the son,^a lest he be angry (2+2)
and you perish in the path,
for his anger flares up quickly;
happy^b are all who seek refuge in him! (3+3)

Notes

1.a. The word "why" (מַלְמָלָה) is used only once at the beginning of v 1a, but it dominates the whole introductory section (2:1-3) and is implied in the following lines. Thus it is repeated four times in the translation to convey the power of the passage.

1.b. The "warriors" (מִלְחָמָה): the Heb word is commonly translated "peoples," which is legitimate. But in both Hebrew and Ugaritic, the word may carry the connotation "warrior" (viz. "warlike people"); see further Craigie, *ZAW* 90 (1978) 377. It is the military context of these opening verses which suggests the nuance warriors.

1.c. "Murmur murderously": literally, "growl a vain thing" (מִלְמָלָה, "growl, murmur," probably being onomatopoeic). V 1 contains the first of several examples of chiasmus in the psalm, though the device cannot always be reflected properly in the English translation. Here, the form is: "they congregate (A) the nations (B); the warriors (B') murmur (A')." Other examples of chiasmus occur in vv 2ab, 5, 8bc, 10.

3.a. The words "fetters" and "cords" may simply imply captivity (viz. the foreign nations were vassal states), but G implies the imagery of a *yoke*, attached by cords, which the nations cast off like rebellious oxen.

5.a. Dahood's rendering of v 5a ("Then he drives away their lieutenants in his ire": *Psalms I, 6*) is ingenious and perhaps plausible. But the meaning of MT is perfectly clear as it stands and fits the context well enough; hence radical change (in meaning) is thought to be unnecessary. For criticisms of Dahood's rendering, see J. VanderKam, *CBQ* 39 (1977) 245-46.

5.b. VanderKam's suggestion (see note 5a) that the root בָּהַב should be translated "to speak passionately" (whence the translation: ". . . in his fury he will berate them") is plausible and possible. But the assumptions that led to a search for a new meaning for בָּהַב in the first place are not entirely convincing: (i) that בָּהַב, "to terrify," is ill-suited to the context, and (ii) that it does not supply a semantic parallel to יַדְבֵּר "he addresses." With respect to the first point, it is quite appropriate for the divine speech to *terrify* (the theme of fear reappears in v 11); with respect to the second point, parallelism need not imply synonyms (or even near-synonyms) in the parallel lines; see J. Barr, *Comparative Philology and the Text of the Old Testament*, 277-82.

6.a. The conjunction and (ו) which opens the line has been omitted as a possible case of dittography (v 5 ends with /w/). In G, v 6 is translated as the opening words of the king (see v 7), rather than God's words: "I have been made king by him on Zion, his holy mountain." This is a possible rendering, though the translation above, based on MT, is to be preferred; by maintaining MT, the parallel structure between vv 1-3 and 4-6 is kept. Dahood follows G in v 6a, but translates: "But I have been anointed his king. . . ." He takes MT's מְשִׁיחִי to be מְשִׁיחִי, from שָׁחַ, "to anoint"; the reading is possible, though MT provides acceptable sense as it stands. With respect to the Ugaritic verb "anoint" in *CTA* 3.2.41, adduced by Dahood in