

Psalm 1 : Choosing the Way



Psalm 1 is not a prayer so much as a reflection on a choice that each of us faces: a choice between a way of behaving that leads to life and a way of behaving that leads to destruction.

The psalmist is congratulating those who choose life, as well as reminding us that we have a sure guide to life in the Torah (the 'law') in which God has revealed the way that leads to life.

This psalm provides a basic perspective in which we are to pray the rest of the psalms in the Psalter, for the psalms, each in their own way, speak of the various ways in which God has revealed God's will and the various responses of the human heart to this revelation.

Psalm 1 (Mode 2. 5....31 / 4.....32)

If you want to be open to God's blessing
do not follow those whose hearts
have no place for God.

Do not linger in the way of sinners,
or sit and scoff with cynics.

Find your delight in the law of the Lord (YHWH).
Meditate (YHGH) on it night and day.

Exodus 3:12-15

God calls Moses to be his instrument in redeeming the Hebrew slaves from Egypt.

God assures Moses: ‘I will be [**'EHYEH**] with you’.

Moses wants to know God’s name

‘I AM [**'EHYEH**] WHO I AM’.

אֶהְיֶה

אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר

You shall say to the Israelites,

‘I AM [**'EHYEH**] has sent me to you ...

‘**YAHWEH** has sent me to you.’

יְהוָה

‘This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth; you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to act in accordance with all that is written in it. For then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall be successful’(Joshua 1:8).

‘The word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe’(Deuteronomy 30:14).

I delight to do your will, O my God;
your law is within my heart’(Psalm 40:8).

‘When the king has taken the throne of his kingdom, he shall have a copy of this law written for him in the presence of the levitical priests. It shall remain with him and he shall read in it all the days of his life, so that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, diligently observing all the words of this law and these statutes, neither exalting himself above other members of the community nor turning aside from the commandment, either to the right or to the left, so that he and his descendants may reign long over his kingdom in Israel’(Deuteronomy 17:18-20).

‘What does it profit you to give God one thing if God asks another of you?’

(John of the Cross: Sayings of light and love 70).

‘May it please the Lord that I might succeed in doing the Lord’s will in everything.’

(Teresa of Avila last words of Life 40.24).

‘Now abandonment alone guides me. I have no other compass! I can no longer ask for anything with fervour except the accomplishment of God’s will in my soul.’

Therese of Lisieux: Story of a Soul.

If you do this, you will be like a tree
planted by running water,
bearing fruit in season,
its leaves always green,
its yield always abundant.
All that you do will prosper.

Jeremiah 17:7-8

‘Thus says the Lord: Blessed are those who trust in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream. It shall not fear when heat comes, and its leaves shall stay green; in the year of drought it is not anxious, and it does not cease to bear fruit.’

Not so for those whose hearts are closed to God.
They are like chaff scattered by the wind.
It will go ill with them at the judgment.
They will have no place among the just.

The Lord looks with love on the way of the just.
The way of sinners leads only to destruction.

Sirach 10:19

Whose offspring are worthy of honour?

Human offspring.

Whose offspring are worthy of honour?

Those who fear the Lord.

Whose offspring are unworthy of honour?

Human offspring.

Whose offspring are unworthy of honour?

Those who break the commandments.

‘Thus says the Lord: Cursed are those who trust in mere mortals and make mere flesh their strength, whose hearts turn away from the Lord. They shall be like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see when relief comes. They shall live in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land.’

(Jeremiah 17:5-6).

‘When I wanted to gather them, says the Lord, there are no grapes on the vine, nor figs on the fig tree; even the leaves are withered, and what I gave them has passed away from them’(Jeremiah 8:13).

‘They will come with dread when their sins are reckoned up, and their lawless deeds will convict them to their face’(Wisdom 4:20).

‘These will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, separated from the presence of the Lord.’
(2Thessalonians 1:9-10)

‘I was hungry and you never gave me anything to eat.’
(Matthew 25:42)

Deuteronomy 30:15-18

‘See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God by loving the Lord your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, then you shall live and become numerous, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess. But if your heart turns away and you do not hear, but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them, I declare to you today that you shall perish; you shall not live long in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess.’

‘Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. The gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it’(Matthew 7:13).

Jesus is ‘the gate’(John 10:7). He is the way’(John 14:6).

‘My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work’(John 4:34).

Matthew 11:28-30

‘Come to me, all you that are weary
and are carrying heavy burdens,
and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me;
for I am gentle and humble in heart,
and you will find rest for your souls.

For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.’

Look to Jesus and be radiant.

See ‘the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.’

(2Corinthians 4:6).

Contemplate Jesus’ mother as the perfect disciple:

‘Here am I, the servant of the Lord;

let it be with me according to your word’(Luke 1:38).

‘Blessed is she who believed

that there would be a fulfillment

of what was spoken to her by the Lord’(Luke 1:45).