

Entrance Psalms 1 and 2

Unlike the culture's predominant view of the calendar year of 2020, our just-concluded journey through the Psalter ended this week with rounds of increasing praise—singing, instruments, dancing and lots of bragging and boasting about YHWH's ultimate power over creation and nations, and His love for His people...His pleasure in us (**147:11, 149:4**). (See **Psalms 146-150**.)

1. How did that contrast between the culture and the Psalms impact you in the final days of 2020? How is living and praying with the Psalms impacting your awareness of God?

Our Psalm journey is teaching me that it will take a lifetime, and then some, to plumb the depth of the Psalms. The varied voices of the Psalms show me human life centered in God. They help me notice the need to cry out to God for myself and others. They show me how to remain God-aware and God-focused whatever the circumstance.

Psalms 1 and 2 serve as an introduction, and Psalms 146-150 are a fitting conclusion to the book of Psalms conceived as a *literary sanctuary*. That the Psalms are a *literary sanctuary* is not a new insight, since Jerome described it as a "large house" (*magna domus*) with Psalms 1 and 2 serving as an entrance to this house. (Tremper Longman III, *Tyndale OT Commentary on Psalms*, p. 35)

2. Consider how the Psalms are a "literary sanctuary" for God's people, a temple not of stones but of words. How does the image of the Psalms as a "literary sanctuary" fit with your experience of reading and praying the Psalms?

How do you think **Psalms 1 and 2** function as the entryway/narthex/lobby to the "literary sanctuary" of the Psalter?

3. Psalm 1 is both an entrance psalm and a wisdom/torah psalm. As you read verses 1 and 2, ponder these words: *blessed, man* (Hebrew: *ish*), *law of the LORD (Torah)*, *meditates*

How are you currently defining those words? How has that changed over time? (Doug's favorite question!)

"Blessed," the Hebrew word *ashrei*, "*happy*," may be a pun on *ashram*, "steps," and hence reinforce the walking metaphor. (Alter, *Psalms*, p. 3)

In Psalms 1 and 2, the spiritual state of the righteous, of those who are open to God's working/activity in them, is called "*blessed*," a term referring to their joyful spiritual condition and the pleasure and satisfaction they get from their life with God, in spite of what happens. (Allen P. Ross, *Psalms Commentary*, p. 184-85)

What would meditating on God's law day and night look like in real life? What helps you make progress in that pursuit?

The verb for meditating, *hagah*, literally means "murmuring," what one does with a text in a culture where there is no silent reading. Sacred texts in the Ancient Near East were written down for the purpose of teaching students to memorize them accurately and perform them repeatedly. (Wenham, *Psalms as Torah*, pp. 52-55) Reciting from memory involves the whole person and cannot be honestly undertaken without real commitment to what is being said. (Wenham, p. 55)

How has "reading, marking, learning and inwardly digesting" Scripture impacted your life? If "inwardly digesting" has included memorizing, how has that helped your progress? Consider memorizing **Psalm 1**.

4. Reflect on the *contrasting similes* of the well-watered tree bearing fruit in season and the chaff, worthless husks that have to be separated from the grain and blown away.

What do you think is the purpose/point of this contrast in **Psalm 1**? How might it help you in evaluating and setting priorities in 2021?

5. **Psalm 1** ends with the observation that God intimately knows and participates in the way of life of those who allow him into their lives. He "embraces" their way. But the way of life of the wicked, those who don't allow him into their lives, is lost. [Some mistakenly think they are not "good enough," while others make their way by self-effort instead of enabling grace. Jesus' teaching and mission targeted both groups, with "woe" to the self-effort crowd who excluded the "not good enough." Jesus describes this "Psalm 1 kind of blessedness" in his Beatitudes, the entry into his teaching.] The way of the wicked will perish, end in destruction.

Commenting on the end of **Psalm 1:3**, in everything the righteous person does he prospers/flourishes, Allen Ross observes:

This is not a blanket statement promising unlimited success; the context itself restricts the application. If the righteous meditate in God's Word, they will live in obedience to it—and doing that is what will succeed. (Ross, *Psalms Commentary 1*, p. 191)

What does Ross's observation add to your personal application of **Psalm 1**? How does Jesus' life (THE man=*ish* in 1:1) help with understanding, praying and living into **Psalm 1**?

6. The second entrance psalm into the "literary sanctuary" is **Psalm 2**, a royal psalm, based on the Davidic covenant (2 Samuel 7:1-16) and interpreted

messianically by the time it was placed as an entrance psalm to the post-exilic Psalter.

The righteous, the people in whom YHWH is at work, are now invited further into the “literary sanctuary” to encounter YHWH and his Anointed One, originally a Davidic king and now THE Anointed One, the Messiah.

“The moral contrast described in Psalm 1 thus becomes the messianic conflict narrated in Psalm 2.” (Reardon, *Christ in the Psalms*, p. 3)

Describe and reflect on the opening scene in your own words. (2:1-3)

7. Psalm 2 has four 3-verse stanzas. Notice who is speaking in each one:

2:1-3 exposes human rebellion, 2:4-6 describes divine ridicule,

2:7-9 develops God’s relationship with his appointed human king who reigns from Zion

2:10-12 tells us to kiss the Son and hide out in the LORD and His Son.

Notice how the entrance psalms begin (1:1) and end (2:12) with “blessedness,” the joyful spiritual condition of the “righteous,” of those who focus on and depend on God and His Son.

8. Psalm 2 is quoted in the New Testament in:

Acts 4:25-26, Rev. 11:18, Acts 13:33, Heb.1:5 and 5:5, Rev. 2:26-27, 12:5, and 19:15

Read Acts 4:24-27 to see how the early Christians understood **Psalm 2** and included it in one of their earliest recorded prayers. What was its meaning for them?

Psalms 1 and 2 both finish up on the theme of divine judgment—how God blesses the just and righteous ones and condemns the wicked. These entrance psalms into the “literary sanctuary” of the Psalms remind us, like our Creeds do: “He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.” (Nicene Creed, BCP, p. 109)

So in the light of the promise we have of unending life in Christ and His forever kingdom, ask God for grace to enjoy, truly find pleasure, in meditating on His teaching day and night...Party on in the Psalms in 2021!

When has reading and praying the Psalms brought you joy?