

BOOK ONE: PSALMS 1-41

PART ONE: THE BELIEVER'S LIFE (PSALMS 1-15)

I. INTRODUCTORY PSALMS (1:1-2:12)

A. WISDOM AND FOLLY (1:1-6)

The first Psalm, a suitable introduction to the book, might properly be designated *The Two Ways*. It contrasts two opposite directions that one's life may take, the one leading to blessing, the other to despair and ruin. The phraseology and style of this psalm resemble that of Proverbs. (See, for example, Prov 2:20-22; 3:12-17.) Thus, it is of the nature of the wisdom literature of the OT. It is didactic rather than lyric, designed for giving instruction rather than for singing.¹

It is in view of this nature that we choose for its title Wisdom and Folly, desiring thus to indicate the sharp distinction between the two ways that are contrasted. Such distinction was surely in the mind of the psalmist, and although he does not use the words *wise*

¹It is difficult to hold that these were composed for ritualistic use, a fact that confronted Mowinckel with a problem relative to his view of the cultic origin of Psalms. Erhard Gerstenberger has observed: "The influence of the 'sages' on some of the extant psalms cannot possibly be overlooked . . . and since 'wisdom' in Old Testament scholarly terminology is tantamount to acultic or even anticultic attitudes, form critics really are in trouble" ("Psalms," in *Old Testament Form Criticism*, ed. John H. Hayes [San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1974], p. 218). L.G. Perdue maintains that the wisdom writers of the OT were *not* anticultic (*Wisdom and Cult, A Critical Analysis of the Views of Cult in the Wisdom Literature of Israel and the Ancient Near East* [Missoula: Scholars' Press, 1977]). Mowinckel treats the problem in "Psalms and Wisdom," *VT Supplement III* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1955): 204-224.

or *wisdom*, it would appear that, without being stated, his purpose was to show the reader the wisdom of walking in the ways of God and the folly of ungodliness. The psalm is brief, consisting of only some 65 words in Hebrew, and to the point. The challenge it gives is unexpressed, yet alarmingly simple — “Why be a fool!” So this short introduction to the book would impress the reader of the Psalms with the seriousness of his undertaking. More than this, it would press him for a decision relative to the way of life he would choose to pursue.

The meter of Psalm 1 has been recognized by some scholars as “uncertain.” Consequently, attempts have been made to recast it on the basis of certain emendations of the text. But let us be reminded of the observation made earlier that the line between poetry and prose in Hebrew is not always sharply delineated. In regard to Psalm 1, Sebastian Burrough makes a strong case for its recognition as prosaic rather than poetic. He states: “Most writers agree that Psalm 1 is a kind of introduction . . . prefixed to the Psalter, instead of what I am convinced it is, namely a half page of prose providing an edifying preface to the ensuing collection.”² The need for emendation in the direction of a more balanced meter would appear to be, consequently, unnecessary.

1. The Wise Man (1:1-3)

Righteous or wicked, godly or ungodly, wise or foolish — whichever terms are used, the contrast in the psalm is well defined. In the OT Scriptures if one is not godly, he is not wise, for there wisdom and godliness are inseparable. This wisdom directs one in the ways of God and is to be distinguished from mere knowledge, such as an encyclopedic accumulation of facts. In the Hebrew, the term wise has the meaning of “skillful” or even “practical.” And nothing is more practical or more wise than to live in accordance with God’s directives for life. Consequently, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” (Prov 9:10). One who does not have a

²Sebastian Burrough, “The Question of Metre in Psalm 1,” *VT XVII* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1967): 46.

reverence for God that leads him to pursue righteousness, a way free from wrong, is not wise, no matter how much knowledge he may possess. Many otherwise intelligent persons do not have the sense to be decent. The very word “righteous” in our language, is from the Middle English *rightwyss* (right + wise), which means “wise way, manner.”³ True wisdom leads one to do what is *right* in the *sight of God* and to refrain from evil. The psalmist commends this kind of life indicating what it avoids, what it delights in, and what it is like.

1:1 The commendation is expressed in the opening words, **blessed is the man**. The term “blessed” does not imply that God has bestowed some particular favor; a different Hebrew term is used to indicate that. Rather, it means that the person has so conducted himself that a condition of blessedness has resulted. “Oh, the happiness *that man* experiences,” the psalmist is saying. And it is a happiness that is very definitely related to conduct. The good life is attractive and brings real, not superficial, happiness.

The source of this happiness is twofold. First, it lies in the avoidance of all of the ways of the wicked. There are some things that a righteous man, a wise man, will not do. (He) **does not walk in the counsel of the wicked**, refusing to adopt their hedonistic philosophy or to be taken in by their devious casuistry.

The wicked are the godless. Isaiah says that they “are like the tossing sea, which cannot rest, whose waves cast up mire and mud,” adding, “‘there is no peace,’ says my God, ‘for the wicked’” (Isa 57:20-21). **Or stand in the way of sinners**. Note the progression — “walks, stands, sits.” That is the nature of involvement in sin. One begins by tuning in on evil counsel. He next ventures an occasional indulgence, in the presence of bad company, even if it means a violation of his conscience. Then, before he realizes it, his life is cast in the new mold; and the change has been so complete that he has become one of that circle who take delight in sneering at goodness and ridiculing religion. The righteous man habitually shunned all of this. The verbs, in the Hebrew, are *perfect* (completed action), indicating with the negatives what, all the while, he has never done, i.e., “who has never walked.”

³*The Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933).

1:2 The state of blessedness or happiness in life finds its source more in what a person does than in what he refrains from doing. The wise man refuses to walk in the way of evil, not because he is bound by an oversensitive conscience but because he has chosen to walk a better way. When it is a matter of choice between the counsel of the wicked and the way of the Lord, for him it is no contest. He chooses the latter. To him **the law of the LORD** is not a burden to be borne, nor even an obligation to be met, but a **delight** to be enjoyed.⁴ It is a gift from the Creator of life providing instruction on how best to live in such a way as to find fullness of life and, consequently, happiness. In a word, happiness is not found by searching for it, not an achievement of the will; happiness is doing what is right. And God has revealed what right is. Any of us who ignores God's direction does so at great peril, for the law of the Lord alone gives meaning and direction to human existence. To abandon the Scriptures is to be left adrift on the sea of life without chart or compass.

On his law he meditates. The purpose of such concern for God's law is indicated in Josh 1:8 — "that you may be careful to do everything written in it." The delight lies in doing the will of God, not just in knowing it. Thus Jesus would say: "Blessed rather are [Oh, the happiness to them!] those who hear the word of God and obey it" (Luke 11:28).

1:3 To indicate what it is like to walk in the way of God, the psalmist uses the figure of a luxurious tree **planted by streams of water**.⁵ The tree, thus situated, is enabled to do what is natural to it; **which yields its fruit in season**. Just so, vitality and fruitfulness are characteristics of the life of righteousness, not as a reward or enticement, but as a natural consequence of such a life. In bearing fruit, the tree is fulfilling the purpose for which it was created. The

⁴Words describing God's law, its beauty and desirability, may be found in Psalms 19:7-11 and 119:1-176.

⁵The similarity of verse 3 to Jer 17:5-8 is readily seen. Some say that the psalmist was dependent upon Jeremiah, but it is just as possible that Jeremiah was quoting from the psalm. Indeed, the figure of a tree by a stream of water as indicative of prosperity was so common in the semiarid lands of the Middle East that it is gratuitous to say that either was borrowing the idea from the other.

man of wisdom is doing the same, finding his purpose in life and life's fulfillment in doing the will of God.

Whatever he does prospers. This statement appears to be a categorical assertion to the effect that the righteous man will never experience any reverses. However, human experience says the contrary (consider Job, for example), and elsewhere the Psalms deal with the suffering of the righteous. Dahood proposes an alternate translation: "Whatever it (the tree) produces is good."⁶ On the basis of the Hebrew text, this is possible. Charles A. Briggs and others translate: "So all that he doeth, he carries through successfully"⁷ — or to a successful outcome — meaning that whatever he does will result in good. A righteous man, like a good tree, will bear good fruit. God's law of the harvest is immutable.

2. The Foolish Man (1:4-5)

1:4 The opposite is true of the ungodly man. Verse 4, in the Hebrew, opens with a negative, expressing a strong antithesis to what has gone before: **Not, so, the wicked!**

What the righteous man is *not*, the wicked is. The latter does walk in ungodly ways; he does stand with sinners, and he takes his place among scoffers. And what the righteous man is, the other is not. He is not blessed with that happiness that comes from God; he has not discovered the *delight* of walking in God's way, and he is not firmly *planted*, not flourishing, not fruitful. Instead, he is like **chaff** which is without appreciable substance and useless, destined to be swept away by any passing breeze. Man's life, apart from God, is without significance or genuine worth, and is utterly futile.

1:5 The psalmist was not unaware that at times the wicked may prosper (Ps 73:3-12); yet even so, they occupy "slippery ground" (73:18). **The wicked will not stand in the judgment.** The translation would appear to indicate a particular judgment, such as the final great judgment day when "each of us will give an account of himself to God" (Rom 14:12). But the definite article in our text

⁶Dahood, *Psalms 1-50*, p. 4.

⁷Briggs, *Commentary*, p. 6.

was supplied by the Massoretes and the consonantal text could equally be read “judgment,” without the article. It would appear certain, on the basis of verse 6, that a judgment of God is indicated, not that of a human tribunal. Yet A.F. Kirkpatrick is probably right when he states that it is not “merely in the last judgment . . . but in every act of judgment by which Jehovah [Yahweh] separates between the righteous and the wicked.”⁸ Anthony L. Ash concurs in this general view when he says: “It is best to take the words here in the overall sense of a life which cannot stand God’s inspection.”⁹

So, those who take their stand with **sinners** will not stand in the judgment; those who sit with mockers will have no place **in the assembly** of the people of God. These words of the psalmist are not the pronouncement of a bigot but of an evangelist. He is appealing for a verdict, pressing for a decision, challenging to commitment.

3. The Crucial Difference (1:6)

1:6 Why does the righteous man experience a special blessedness? **For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous.** This means, not merely that God is acquainted with that way, but that he is involved in it, watching over it and caring for it. It is the way designed by a loving God whereby humankind might experience what life is all about. It is the way of fruitfulness, for a righteous life is never barren. It is in this way alone that one may find fullness and completeness. Surely all who walk in it are wise.

And why is it folly to reject God’s way? Because **the way of the wicked will perish.** This is not a hostile pronouncement of judgment. It is an anguished cry. Only too well the psalmist recognizes that “there is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death” (Prov 14:12).

The first word of Psalm 1 is “blessed,” describing the condition of one who walks in God’s way. The last word is “perish” and refers to the end of those who reject the way of God. These two words, the first and the last, encompass all that is in between. Thus the psalm

⁸Kirkpatrick, *The Book of Psalms*, 1:4.

⁹Ash and Miller, *Psalms*, p. 35.

is ended. The righteous will lay it to heart. Regrettably, the foolish, unless they turn from their folly, will go on with their mocking.

B. HOPELESSNESS OR HAPPINESS (2:1-12)

The contrast between wisdom and folly introduced in the first Psalm is reflected also in the second, with this difference. There the distinction was between the ungodly man and the godly. Here, although the same distinction could be made, the contrast is between those who “rage against God” and those who “put their trust in him.” Again, the contrast is sharply drawn, depicting the hopelessness of the “ragers” and the blessedness of the “trusters.” There is the further difference between the two Psalms: in the first the focus is upon one’s attitude to God’s *torah* (God’s instruction). Here the crucial test is one’s attitude towards God’s Messiah.

Psalm 2 is classified as a royal psalm, with its setting in Jerusalem. A king is being crowned, and subject nations in rebellion seize the moment as an opportunity to revolt. Buitendijk does not consider the psalm to be a portrayal of a real situation. Instead, he believes it to be a visionary scene of revolt against God and his anointed one. This position is necessitated by his view that the psalm is postexilic, written at a time when there were no kings in Israel, and therefore indicating a future idealized ruler *whom God would raise up*.¹⁰ Gunkel, on the other hand, with many others, holds that Psalm 2 does indeed belong to the royal period of Israel’s history.¹¹ Kirkpatrick suggests that the king is Solomon.¹² David had extended his kingdom from the borders of Egypt and the Gulf of Aqabah to the Euphrates river in Mesopotamia. While David was yet living, Solomon was anointed king at the spring Gihon, from which he ascended the hill of Zion to occupy the throne (1 Kgs 1:38-48). However, the setting of the psalm cannot be definitely determined.

¹⁰Moses Buitendijk, *The Psalms Chronologically Treated, with a New Translation* (New York: KTAV, 1969), p. 792.

¹¹Gunkel, *The Psalms*, p. 23.

¹²Kirkpatrick, *The Book of Psalms*, 1:5.

From earliest Christian times the messianic implications of Psalm 2 have been recognized. Some would say that it was intentionally or directly messianic, with no reference to any revolt or to any king of the time when it was written. It seems more likely, however, that a situation within the experience of the psalmist is depicted. Nevertheless, five times this psalm is quoted in the NT with reference to Christ, and the application fits so perfectly that we may see in the psalm a foreshadowing – a prophecy, if you will – of Messiah Jesus. The psalm may be set at a definite point of time in history, yet with content anticipatory of Jesus. More than this, we may see its focus yet in the future, beyond history, upon the time of the ultimate and final triumph of the Messiah. In a very real sense, the psalm is applicable to any occasion of *rebellion* against the Lord.

1. The Nations Are Rebellious (2:1-3)

2:1 The psalm begins with a question – **why?** Why, indeed, should any **conspire** against God? Consider the folly of it. The kings of the earth would utterly destroy Israel, if they could. But God had made a promise to this people (Gen 12:2-3). In his plan, there was a destiny they must fulfill. With whatever fury men mount their rebellion against the Lord, within a few decades, at most, they pass out of the picture, and the purposes of God go on toward their realization! What folly it is for a people to set themselves in opposition to God’s design. “Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts” (Ps 46:6). The futility of rebellion against God should be obvious.

The rebellious are the *goyim*, a term usually signifying non-Israelite peoples, hence the translation “heathen,” otherwise “nations.” They *rage* (KJV), they *conspire* (RSV), they *make a tumult* (Berkeley Version). Jude describes such persons as “wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame” (Jude 13a). In Psalm 1 the godly man *meditated* on the will of God. Here the same verb (translated **plot**) describes the activity of the rebellious nations. However, they *meditate* evil. It is important that beings with intelligence should think. But what we think about is also important, whether it be the things of God or the alternative, *vain things* (the ultimate futility), whether we meditate upon good or evil. Here a word from the

Apostle Paul is appropriate: “[W]hatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, – if anything is excellent, or praiseworthy, – think about such things” (Phil 4:8).

2:2 The kings . . . take their stand . . . against the LORD. To reject the Lord’s anointed king was to reject God himself. The Psalmist (David, according to Acts 4:25) would understand the expression **his Anointed One** (as in 1 Sam 26:11) to refer to the human king whom God had chosen to maintain justice in the land. Yet here is also a foreshadowing of the Messiah who was to come; that is, Jesus. To reject him is to reject the God who sent him (cf. Matt 10:40; John 12:48).

2:3 God asks of his king a reign of righteousness and he calls all peoples to be loyal to such a reign. Yet how quick some are to cast off any restraint put upon them by God. **Let us break their chains, . . . and throw off their fetters.** The verbs are cohortative, indicating, in this case, “a more or less emphatic statement of a fixed determination *Come! let us break asunder.*”¹³ The paraphrase of J.A. Alexander is illuminating: “Let us fling away from us with scorn these feeble bands by which we have been hitherto confined.”¹⁴ There are many who would thus casually free themselves from any restraints God would impose, not realizing that the cords with which he would bind us are cords of love (see Hos 11:4). To free ourselves from God’s restraints is to subject ourselves to a bondage from which there is no escape!

The revolt depicted in Psalm 2 finds application in Acts 4:24-28 to Herod, Pilate, the Gentiles, and the people of Israel in their conspiracy against God and his Messiah, Jesus. The rulers supposed that by crucifying Jesus and by persecuting the witnesses of the resurrection even to death, they would overthrow the kingdom of God. But of course those who engaged in such unbridled acts of rage did so in vain. So it is always with those who rage against the Lord.

¹³William Gesenius, *Hebrew Grammar*, 28th ed., trans. A.E. Cowley, ed. E. Kautzsch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910-1966), p. 320.

¹⁴J.A. Alexander, *The Psalms Translated and Explained* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1863), 1:10.

2. The Lord Is Undisturbed (2:4-6)

2:4 We may be thankful that God has a sense of humor. Martin Luther wrote: “If I were as our Lord God, and had committed the government to my son, as He to His Son, and these vile people were as disobedient as now they be, I would knock the world in pieces.”¹⁵ But what does God do? **The One enthroned in heaven laughs!** G. Campbell Morgan emphasizes that this laughter of God is “derision . . . contempt for those who in foolish pride of heart oppose themselves to him.”¹⁶ Perhaps a note of contempt is involved, but it would seem, also to be the laughter of amusement.

The laughter of God would have seemed ironic to the great empires of the ancient world. The rulers of Assyria, Egypt, and later of Babylonia, would have laughed at little Israel. But Israel, though a small people, had the promise of God, existed as the covenant people of God, and would become the instrument of God, through whom Messiah would come. There was a divine purpose invested in this people, and any attempt by even the most powerful of the earth to thwart that purpose could only give rise to divine amusement and, towards the unrepentant, to divine wrath.

2:5 God abounds in love and is slow to anger (Exod 34:6), yet the time comes when he will call the rebellious to account. There is a limit to his patience. **Then he rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath.** H.C. Leupold notes the general vagueness of the term “then,” and its ominous import — “you can never tell when His anger will flash forth.”¹⁷ But let us be assured that in the fullness of time the wrath of God will be poured out upon evil. Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) is known for his famous sermon, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.” Perhaps we hear little such preaching today, yet the theme is neglected at our peril. God is “not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Pet 3:9b). Yet we are duly warned that only divine anger

¹⁵Quoted by Rowland E. Prothero in *The Psalms in Human Life* (London: John Murray, 1905), p. 123.

¹⁶G. Campbell Morgan, *Searchlights from the Word* (Westwood, NJ: Revell, reprint of 1952), p. 153.

¹⁷Leupold, *Exposition*, p. 48.

and judgment remain for “those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus” (2 Thess 1:8).

2:6 Nations and people plot in vain against God. “You are at liberty to do so,” God would say, “but I . . .” — and the **I** is emphatic (v. 6). He sets his king on his throne on the **hill of Zion** (Jerusalem). If this psalm is part of a coronation ceremony in its original context, the king may have been Solomon, as Kirkpatrick suggested. In terms of the Psalm’s messianic use in the NT we see Jesus who, in spite of the opposition of humankind, has been enthroned over the everlasting kingdom of God and sits at the Father’s right hand (Col 3:1).

3. The Son Is Enthroned (2:7-9)

2:7 In this verse the chosen one quotes **the decree of Yahweh** — perhaps a reference to 2 Sam 7:11-16, which records God’s promise to David. **You are my Son; today I have become your Father.** In the ancient code of Hammurabi words such as these were part of an adoption ceremony. They are relevant to the relationship between Solomon and the Lord, for God had said to David: “I will be his father [Solomon’s], and he will be my son” (2 Sam 7:14).¹⁸ If these words are part of a coronation liturgy, then it is said that their recital indicates God’s adoption and acknowledgment of the new king as the legitimate ruler of his people. This day would indicate the day of the inauguration. Other elements of the ceremony are said to be the anointing, the promise of victory over enemies, the promise of the continuance of the kingdom of David forever (Ps 89:29), and a plea that God endow the king with righteousness (Ps 72:1). In the NT, the words of verse 7 are recognized in their application to Jesus (Acts 13:33), “today” being a reference to his resurrection as the day of his inauguration (Acts 13:32).

2:8 Great expectations arose whenever a new king came to the throne of David, such as expressed in **I will make the nations your**

¹⁸Elsewhere God calls Israel “my son” (Exod 4:22; Hos 11:1). And in Ps 89:27, it is said of David (with messianic implications): “I will also appoint him my firstborn, the most exalted of the kings of the earth.”

inheritance (the *goyim*, the *ethnoi*) and **the ends of the earth your possession**. These expectations were never realized by any king in Jerusalem. Their fulfillment had to await the coming of the only begotten Son of God, whose kingdom would indeed become world-wide in its scope. In the ancient inaugural, however it was not unnatural to use hyperbolic language, just as Daniel might say to Darius, “O king, live forever” (Dan 6:21).

2:9 You will rule them with an iron scepter. In the inaugural ceremony, it is said, these words would be uttered as the scepter was presented to the king. At the same time, foreign kings would offer acts of homage. The verb “rule,” in the Hebrew, may also mean “shepherd” (them) [i.e., a king’s rule was like that of a shepherd over his sheep, to rule was to shepherd], as it is translated in the LXX (ποιμανεῖς, *poimaneis*) and quoted in Rev 2:27; 12:5; and 19:15 (NIV translates it “rule”). And the rod may signify the shepherd’s rod, as in Lev 27:32. The parallelism of verse 9 would then be antithetic: “[Some] you will rule/shepherd . . . ; [others] you will dash . . . to pieces.” However, until verse 12 this psalm is dealing exclusively with rebellious nations and kings. The KJV rendering for the word “rule” is “break” (them) [representing a different vocalization of the Hebrew word תִּרְעֵם]. “Break them” is a better parallel with **dash them** in verse 9. Therefore, the KJV translation “break them” is preferred here.¹⁹

4. The Ones Who Trust Are Blessed (2:10-12)

2:10-11a The theme of wisdom, evident in Psalm 1, is definitely expressed in Psalm 2, with a reference to that wisdom that will lead

¹⁹The quotations in Revelation are, as noted, from the LXX of about 200 B.C. and have “rule” instead of “break.” The Greek version would be the one with which John’s readers would be familiar. And although it differs from the original Hebrew text, it is equally true as a description of the activity of the Messiah and John would have no hesitancy in using it. [editor: On the other hand, the Hebrew may have been accurately translated as “rule/shepherd” by the LXX and maintained in the Revelation paraphrases. Only the vocalization would change between “break” (תִּרְעֵם) from רִעַע) and “rule” (תִּרְעֵם) from רִעַה) as translations.] See also a masterful exposition on Psalm 2 by James L. Mays, *The Lord Reigns: A Theological Handbook to the Psalms* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994),

its possessor to serve God; this, in sharp contrast to the folly of rebellion against him. **[B]e wise; be warned.** No matter how intellectual one may be, if he refuses warning (as instruction), if he is no longer teachable, he is no longer wise. **Serve the LORD [Yahweh] with fear,** since it is he who holds the ultimate fate of kings and nations in his hands.

2:11b-12 Rejoice with trembling. This seems an odd combination of terms, although it is conceivable that one might rejoice before the Lord even while trembling in reverential awe. From ancient times, translators have wrestled with how best to render the text of verses 11 and 12. Crucial to the understanding of the passage is the true significance of the term rendered “Son” in the NIV and some other versions, that term being *בן* (*bar*). In Aramaic it does mean “son” and when so translated yields **Kiss the Son.** But in Hebrew the term means “pure” (Ps 19:8; 24:4; 73:1) or “an open field,” “a plain” (Job 39:3, RSV). On the basis of these meanings for the Hebrew, instead of “Kiss the Son,” the following have been proposed.

“Worship purely” (Jerome), “kiss sincerely” (Briggs, with reference to kissing the hand in honor of a deity, as in Job 31:17), “do homage truly” (Moffatt), “do homage (in) purity” (Soncino, with reference to the king), and “kiss the ground” (Ringgren). Adherence to the Hebrew text, as it is, would require some such reading. Still retaining the Hebrew, but separating the letters into different words, Dahood proposes: “O men of the grave” or “mortal men,” attaching the words to the preceding verse: “Live in trembling, O mortal men!”²⁰ William L. Holladay follows Dahood, except that he recognizes a participle, “forgetting,” instead of the construct noun,

pp. 108-116. With reference to verse 9 Mays wrote: “Read literally, those two lines seem cruel and pointless. They smack of an insane tyranny that possesses only to destroy. But in its original sphere of use, these words were not meant in that way at all. Behind them is a ritual, known particularly from the ceremonies of Egypt as part of the procedures of installing a king. The names of the nations over which he claimed sovereignty would be written on clay tablets, and in a symbolic ritual the king would smash these tablets with his scepter. Translated, this dramatic ritual language simply means, ‘You shall claim and rule them with a power they cannot resist’” (p. 111).

²⁰Dahood, *Psalms 1-50*, pp. 13f.

“men” (the terms are similar in Hebrew) with the result: “Ones forgetting the grave,”²¹ that is, forgetting their mortal nature. A slight change of the Hebrew *bar* would allow the root meaning “choose” with “Kiss the chosen one” (Goodspeed) as a possibility. Beyond this, definite emendation of the text, involving a relocation of terms, is necessary to secure the reading, “Serve the Lord with fear, with trembling kiss his feet” as in the Revised Standard Version and others.

Those who declare, *ipso facto*, that the Aramaic *bar* (son) must be rejected, of necessity must rely on such proposals as the above. In view of the fact that the Hebrew word for son (*ben*) appears in verse 7, the question naturally arises, why would the writer substitute the Aramaic word in verse 12? Why indeed? Two reasons have been suggested. One, it is for the sake of euphony; the following Hebrew term is *pen* “lest,” and so *bar pen* is substituted for *ben pen*. Again, and with more feasibility, it is suggested that since the admonition of verses 10-13 is addressed to foreign kings, the foreign term is appropriate. A Phoenician inscription with such usage of the Aramaic *bar* lends credence to the argument. It is even possible that *bar* came to have significance as a title, equivalent to a name. The New English Bible reflects such a possibility in its translation, “Kiss the mighty one.” In the ancient world, homage was shown to rulers by kissing their feet.

Reviewing the proposed translations, it will be noted that, in some, verse 12 is interpreted as relating to God: “Serve the Lord with fear . . . kiss his feet,” “worship purely,” etc. The phrase **lest he be angry** points in this direction, judging that elsewhere in the OT where the expression occurs, the reference is always to God. (Even so, God could be angry if one refused to kiss the Son.) So the verse is also interpreted as having reference to the Son: “Kiss the chosen one,” “Kiss the mighty one.” Since the earlier verses of the psalm include both the Lord and his anointed, it would seem that the Lord (v. 11) and the Son (v. 12) would be an appropriate parallel here, the Lord being equally angry whether the nations rejected

²¹William L. Holladay, “A New Proposal for the Crux in Psalm 2:12,” *VT* 28 (1978): 110-112. Holladay states flatly that “‘Kiss the son’ is clearly impossible.”

him or his anointed. It would be the part of wisdom to honor the divinely appointed king lest God is the one who becomes angry, or the Son, or both.

The psalm closes on a positive note. Although some may engage in the attempt to thwart the purposes of God, others find life and happiness in what is to them the privilege of serving him. The rebellious are urged to pursue the course of wisdom. Their rebellion can only lead to ruin, but **blest are all who take refuge in him.**

II. LIVING CONFIDENTLY (3:1–7:17)

A. TROUBLED BUT UNAFRAID (3:1-8)

Psalm 3 has been classified as an individual lament. Many have considered it to be a morning prayer. The title, “A Psalm” (*Mizmor*) provided by the ancients, together with three appearances of the term *selah*, indicates that it was designed to be recited, or sung, to musical accompaniment. On the part of numerous scholars, the psalm is believed to have been written for, or adapted to, liturgical use by a congregation of worshipers. Buttenwieser considers the “I” of the psalm to be a personification of general distress in the land, without reference to the personal suffering of the writer.²² This, if true, would put the psalm in the class of communal lament. However, the content seems to reflect rather a personal experience.

The historical reference to David in the superscription is dismissed by many as without validity. As we have observed, the superscriptions do represent later additions to the text. In the present instance, the following comparisons have been suggested as indicative of a relationship to the event in the life of David that is indicated. His enemies are many (v. 1); compare “The hearts of the men of Israel are with Absalom” (2 Sam 15:13). His enemies said, “God will not deliver him” (v. 2) — “The LORD has handed the kingdom over to your son Absalom” (2 Sam 16:8). David ascended the Mount of Olives with his head covered (2 Sam 15:30) — “But you . . . O LORD . . . lift up my head” (v. 3). Absalom had a multitude of

²²Buttenwieser, *The Psalms*, p. 397.