



PSALM 1

"Happy is the one"

Translation and Performance Notes

LEGEND FOR COLORED WORDS:

Key term

Exegesis of emotions

Imagery

Other translation challenges

Hebrew Text	verse	English Close-but-Clear Translation
אַשְׁרֵי-הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר לֹא הָלַךְ בַּעֲצַת רְשָׁעִים וּבְדֶרֶךְ חַטָּאִים לֹא עָמָד וּבְמוֹשָׁב לָצִים לֹא יָשָׁב:	1	Happy is the one who has not walked in the counsel of wicked people, has not taken a stand in the way of sinful people, and has not settled in the dwelling place of insolent people!
כִּי אִם בְּתוֹרַת יְהוָה חֲפָצוֹ וּבְתוֹרָתוֹ יִהְיֶה יוֹמָם וּלְיָלֵלָה:	2	Instead, his delight is in YHWH's instruction, and he meditates on his instruction day and night.
וְהָיָה כַּעֲצֵץ שְׂתוּל עַל-פְּלִי מַיִם אֲשֶׁר פִּרְיוֹ יִתֵּן בְּעִתּוֹ וְעֵלְהוּ לֹא-יִבּוֹל וְכָל אֲשֶׁר-יַעֲשֶׂה יִצְלֵחַ:	3	And he will become like a tree transplanted beside water channels, that gives its fruit in its season, and whose leaves do not wither, and he will cause all that he does to flourish.
לֹא-כֵן הָרְשָׁעִים כִּי אִם-כַּמֵּץ אֲשֶׁר-תִּדְּפֶנּוּ רוּחַ:	4	Not so the wicked people! Instead, they will be like chaff that the wind drives away.
עַל-כֵּן לֹא-יָקֻמוּ רְשָׁעִים בַּמִּשְׁפָּט וְחַטָּאִים בַּעֲדַת צְדִיקִים:	5	Therefore, wicked people will not stand firm in the judgment, and sinful people [will not stand] in the group of righteous people.
כִּי-יִדַּע יְהוָה דֶּרֶךְ צְדִיקִים וְדֶרֶךְ רְשָׁעִים תֵּאבֵד:	6	Because YHWH cares for the way of righteous people, and the way of wicked people will come to an end.

GENERAL TRANSLATION TIPS FOR THIS PSALM:

- To translate poetry accurately and beautifully, a knowledge of both the source language's poetry and the target language's poetry is needed. So, here are the steps we recommend to follow when setting out to translate this or any psalm:
 1. **GAIN AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE TARGET LANGUAGE'S POETRY/ARTS.** Research and analyze many examples from numerous genres of poetry, storytelling, and music in the target language and culture, and document findings. See our [Local Arts Analysis Guide](#) for help.
 2. **GAIN AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE SOURCE LANGUAGE'S (HEBREW) MEANING AND POETRY.** The aim of all our materials is to provide exactly this for the translator, poet/musician/artist, and consultant: an understanding of what the psalm *means*, as well as its *poetics*.
 3. **TRANSLATE THE PSALM IN THE APPROPRIATE LOCAL ART/POETRY GENRE(S).**
 4. **TEST THE TRANSLATION WITH THE LANGUAGE COMMUNITY, SEEKING FEEDBACK ABOUT BOTH WORD CHOICES AND FORM/GENRE/MEDIA OF TRANSLATION.**

TRANSLATION TIPS - THE PSALM AS A WHOLE

These are the elements that we believe are most helpful to keep in mind during both drafting and checking translations, to help verify that the translation or performance is accurate beyond just a word- or verse-level; just as important is accuracy on the level of a **whole**.

1. Overview

The picture below gives a gives a basic **Overview** of the Psalm, answering the following questions:

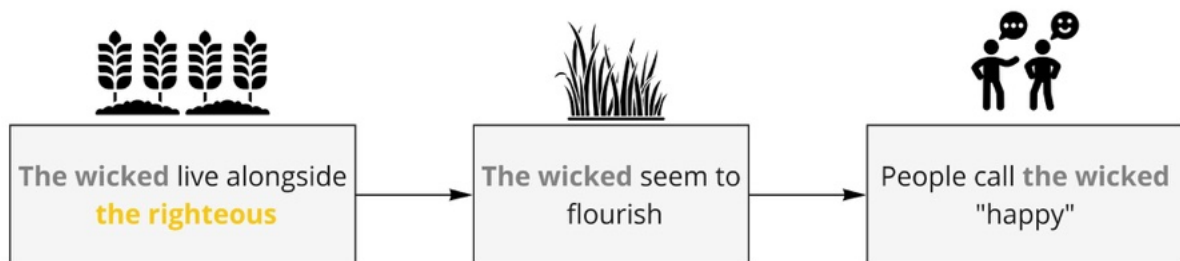
- **Title-what title best describes this unique psalm?**
 - "Happy is the one"
- **Purpose-why was this psalm written?**
 - To persuade the hearer that following YHWH's instruction is worthwhile.
- **Content-In summary, what is said in this psalm?**

- It is not the wicked, but the one who follows YHWH's instruction who is "happy." This is because YHWH cares for the way of righteous people, and the wicked's way will come to an end.
- Message—what is the general theme of this psalm? What seems to be the main point the psalmist wanted his audience to realize by hearing this psalm?
 - In the end, it's those who follow YHWH's instruction who will flourish.

2. Story Behind the Psalm and Background Situation

Every psalm has a coherent story behind it. However, many psalms are not written in typical "story" format, with a clear beginning, middle, and end. Here, we attempt to understand the story and background that prompted the psalmist to write.




- **Story Behind**-How do the various parts of the psalm fit together into a single, coherent story? What is the main message/theme conveyed by this "story behind"?
 - The theme of the story behind Psalm 1 can be summarized as 'The way of the wicked will come to an end.' At the beginning of this story, wicked people live alongside righteous people, and the wicked people seem to flourish. That is why many people call the wicked people "happy" or "blessed." But the psalmist calls the righteous people the "happy" ones, because there will be a time when judgment comes. YHWH will separate the wicked people from the righteous people and remove the wicked people from the land. Then, the righteous people will alone possess the land, and they will flourish like trees in YHWH's garden.
- **Background Situation**-what are the series of events leading up to the time in which the psalm was written?



3. Layout

Knowing the layout of the psalm by sections helps us to understand the progression of thought as the poem progresses.

How to read the visual below: The picture below shows the main “chunks” or pieces of the poem. Verse numbers appear on the left. The second column has a title for each section. The large third column contains a brief summary of the section's content. As you read through the content column, you will see important words and ideas highlighted in similar colors. The icons on the right may be used as memory aids.

v. 1	Happy is the one	...who has not taken a stand in the way of sinful people, but follows the way of YHWH's instruction. He will flourish like a tree !	
v. 2			
v. 3			
v. 4	Not so the wicked	When judgment comes, they will be blown away like chaff and will not stand with the righteous.	
v. 5			
v. 6	Because YHWH	...cares for the way of the righteous, and the way of wicked people will come to an end.	

Progression—what is the flow of thought as the poem progresses?

Psalms 1 compares two kinds of people and how they relate to YHWH:

- The first part (verses 1-3) focuses on "the happy" person. This person avoids the way of sinful people, and is devoted to YHWH's instruction. Therefore, this person flourishes like a tree.
- The second part (verses 4-5) deals with "the wicked" people. When the final judgment comes, these people will be blown away like chaff and will not stand with the righteous people.
- The third part (verse 6) focuses on YHWH as the reason for the two different results that the righteous people and the wicked people experience. YHWH cares for the way of righteous people, but the way of wicked people will come to an end.

4. Emotions

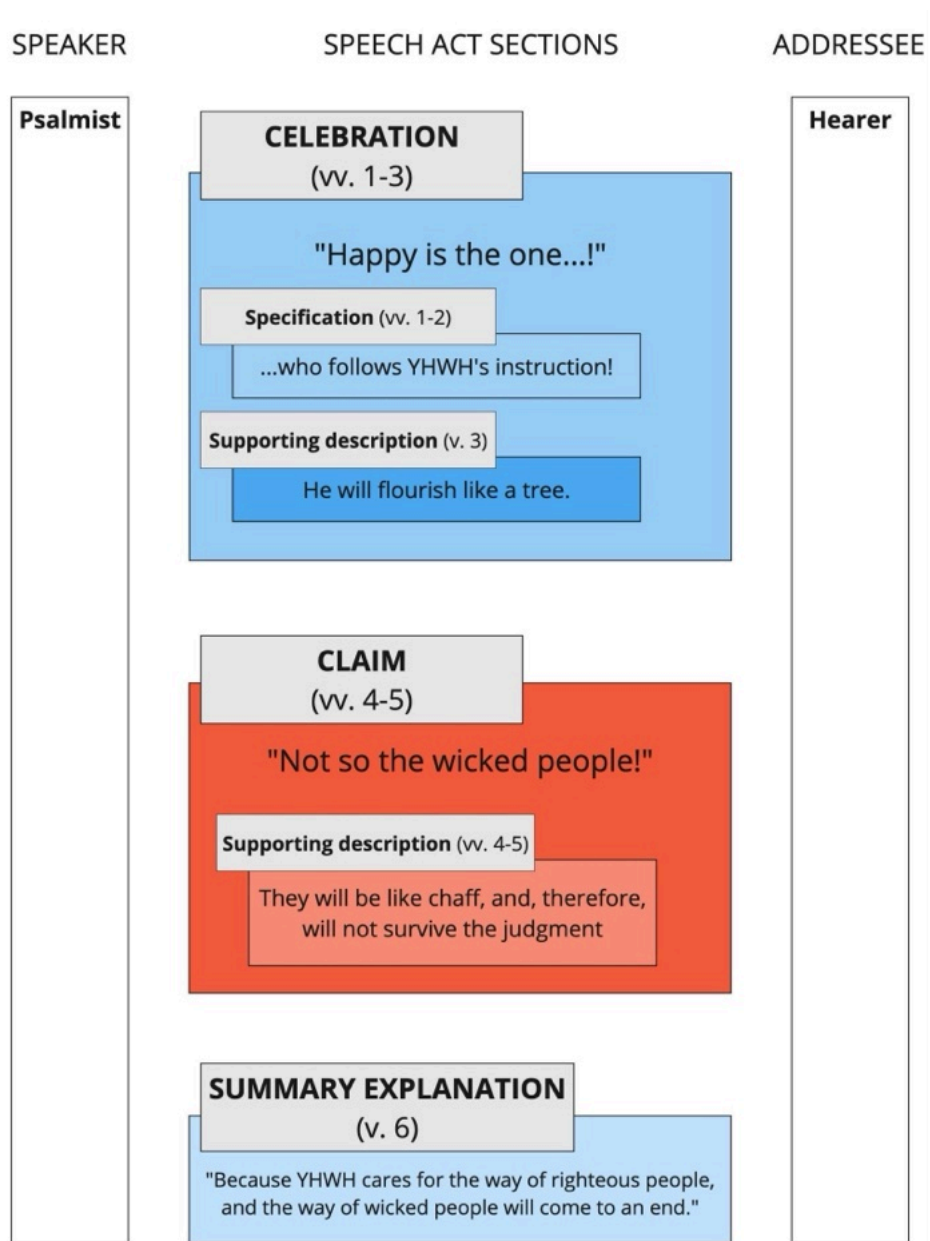
Part of poetry is communicating emotion. Each section, and even each verse, can contain a number of different emotions. Here are the main emotional themes of each section:

v. 1	Happy is the one	admiration
v. 2		
v. 3		
v. 4	Not so the wicked	contempt
v. 5		
v. 6	Because YHWH	confidence

5. Participants and Speech Acts

In poetry, it is important to keep track of who is speaking, who is the audience, and what it is that the speaker is trying to do with his words.

In the chart below, the left-hand column identifies the speaker, who is the psalmist. The right-hand column identifies the audience, who is the psalmist's unspecified hearer or hearers. The middle column tells what the speaker is trying to do with his words (his speech acts) in each section.



6. Poetic Features

In the psalms, the author skillfully uses language to create poetry. The poetic features of a psalm may include the creative use of words, sounds, structure, and other elements. The poetry is often intended to have an effect on the audience. Here are the most important poetic features in this psalm, which should be retained in a performance or translation of the psalm if possible.

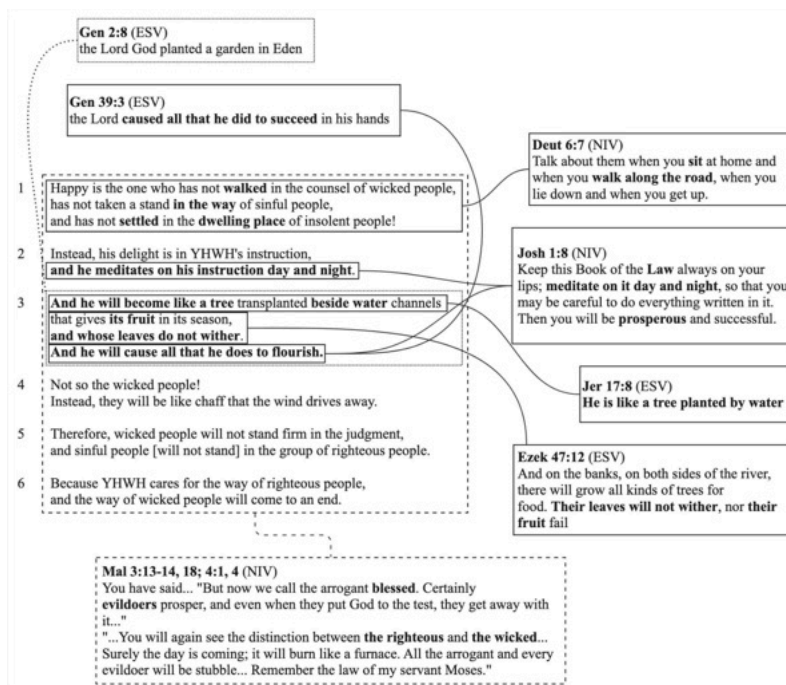
Poetic Feature: No Standing

There are several similarities between verses 1 and 5:

<p>אֲשֶׁר־הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר לֹא הֵלךְ בְּעֵצַת רְשָׁעִים וּבְדֶרֶךְ חַטָּאִים לֹא עָמַד וּבְמוֹשָׁב לְצִים לֹא יָשָׁב: כִּי אִם בְּתוֹכָתָּה יְהוָה חִפְצוֹ וּבְתוֹרָתוֹ יְהוָה יוֹמָם וּלְלַיְלָה: וְהוֹיָה כְּעֵץ שְׁתוּל עַל־פְּלִי מַיִם אֲשֶׁר פִּרְיוֹ יִתֵּן בְּעֵתוֹ וְעָלְהוּ לֹא־יִבֹּל וְכָל אֲשֶׁר־יַעֲשֶׂה יִצְלִיחַ:</p>	<p>1 Happy is the one who does not walk in the counsel of wicked people and does not come to a standstill in the pathway of sinful people, and does not settle in the dwelling place of insolent people.</p>
<p>לֹא־יִכֹּן הַרְשָׁעִים כִּי אִם־כֶּמֶץ אֲשֶׁר־תִּדְפֶּנּוּ רוּחַ: עַל־כֵּן לֹא־יָקִמוּ רְשָׁעִים בַּמִּשְׁפָּט חַטָּאִים בְּעֵדַת צְדִיקִים:</p>	<p>2 But his delight is in the instruction of YHWH, and he rehearses his instruction day and night.</p> <p>3 And he will become like a tree transplanted beside streams of water, which gives its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither, and he makes successful all that he does.</p>
<p>כִּי־יִדַּע יְהוָה דֶּרֶךְ צְדִיקִים וְדֶרֶךְ רְשָׁעִים תֵּאבֵד:</p>	<p>4 Not so the wicked people. Rather, they will be like chaff that the wind drives away.</p> <p>5 Therefore, wicked people will not stand firm in the trial, and sinful people will not stand in the congregation of righteous people.</p>
	<p>6 Because YHWH cares for the way of righteous people, and the way of wicked people will come to an end.</p>

- Both verses contain negated verbs that mean *stand*.
- In Hebrew, The phrase **in the counsel of wicked people** in verse 1a is similar in structure and sound to the phrase **in the group of righteous people** in verse 5b.
- Thus, just as the righteous person does not stand with wicked people (verse 1), neither will wicked people stand with righteous people (verse 5).

Poetic Feature: Day-and-Night Meditation



Psalm 1 alludes to multiple passages in the Old Testament:

- Language from Joshua 1:8 includes "meditating" on YHWH's "instruction" "day and night" (verse 2), the "way" (verses 1, 6), and "make successful" (הצליח, verse 3).
- The description of the righteous person as a tree (verse 3) draws from Jeremiah 17:8 and Ezekiel 47:12.
- Verse 3 recalls Joseph. The phrase "and he will cause all that he does to flourish" echoes the description of Joseph in Genesis 39:3, and Joseph is also described as a fruitful tree by a water source in Genesis 49:22.
- The language of "walking," "way," and "sitting/settling" in verse 1 recalls Deuteronomy 6 and the command to love YHWH with one's whole being.
- The Psalms follow immediately after Malachi, and Psalm 1 picks up many of the themes from the end of Malachi (such as "blessedness," righteous vs wicked, chaff, Torah, coming judgment).

What is the effect of these allusions? The psalmist did not randomly choose these OT passages. The choice of OT passages is strategic. Psalm 1 alludes to the first and last books of the Torah (Genesis and Deuteronomy), the first and last books of the prophets (Joshua and Malachi), and the first book of the latter prophets (Jeremiah).¹ Psalm 1 provides a guided tour through YHWH's instruction in the

¹ Jeremiah was the first of the latter prophets according to the order in an early tradition preserved in the Talmud (Baba Bathra 14b).

Law and the Prophets. The author gives the essence of their teaching about YHWH's instruction in a short but powerful poem.

7. Prominence

It is also important to consider how the author chose to draw attention to certain parts of the psalm. Here are the parts of the psalm that we believe are most prominent, and thus should be most prominent in a performance of the psalm.

Prominence Feature: The Climax of Flourishing

אֲשֶׁר־יֵהְיֶה אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר לֹא הָלַךְ בְּעֵצַת רָשָׁעִים וּבְדֶרֶךְ חַטָּאִים לֹא עָמַד וּבְמִוֶּשֶׁב לְצִדִּים לֹא יָשָׁב:	1	Happy is the one who has not walked in the counsel of wicked people, has not taken a stand in the way of sinful people, and has not settled in the dwelling place of insolent people!
כִּי אִם בְּתוֹרַת יְהוָה חִפְצוֹ וּבְתוֹרָתוֹ יִהְיֶה יוֹמָם וָלַיְלָה:	2	Instead, his delight is in YHWH's instruction, and he meditates on his instruction day and night.
וְהָיָה כְּעֵץ שֶׁחַיִּל עַל־פְּלִי מַיִם אֲשֶׁר פִּרְיוֹ וַיִּתֵּן בְּעִתּוֹ וְעָלְהוּ לֹא־יִבֹּל וְכָל אֲשֶׁר־יַעֲשֶׂה יִצְלִיחַ:	3	And he will become like a tree transplanted beside water channels that gives its fruit in its season, and whose leaves do not wither. And he will cause all that he does to flourish .
לֹא־כֵן הַרְשָׁעִים כִּי אִם־כַּמֶּזֶץ אֲשֶׁר־תִּדְחֶנּוּ רִיחַ:	4	Not so the wicked people! Instead, they will be like chaff that the wind drives away.
עַל־כֵּן לֹא־יִקְמְדוּ רָשָׁעִים בַּמִּשְׁפָּט וְחַטָּאִים בְּעֵצַת צְדִיקִים:	5	Therefore, wicked people will not stand firm in the judgment, and sinful people [will not stand] in the group of righteous people.
כִּי־יִרְצֶה יְהוָה דֶּרֶךְ צְדִיקִים וְדֶרֶךְ רָשָׁעִים תֵּאבֵד:	6	Because YHWH cares for the way of righteous people, and the way of wicked people will come to an end.

The most prominent part of the psalm is the final line of the first section. In particular, there is emphasis on the final Hebrew word of this line: **he will cause to flourish** (יִצְלִיחַ).

This word can refer to success on a journey (Joshua 1:8) as well as to the flourishing of a plant (see Ezekiel 17:9), and both of these images are prominent in Psalm 1 (journey imagery in verses 1 and 6; tree imagery in verse 3). So, the word unites the two most important images in the psalm.

And, the subject of the verb is ambiguous. Is it the righteous person, the tree, or YHWH? See [The Grammar of Ps 1:3d](#). In effect, the word ties together the flourishing of the tree, the flourishing of the righteous person, and YHWH as the cause of all flourishing.

Finally, the word helps connect Psalm 1 to both Joshua (Joshua 1:8) and the Joseph story in Genesis (Gen 39:3, 23). Both of these men were powerful examples of faithfulness and flourishing under YHWH's care.

TRANSLATION TIPS, VERSE BY VERSE

Gray boxes discuss sections and subsections. The headings (in green) are guides, and not part of the Biblical text.

VERSES 1-3: Happy is the One

- The topic of the first three verses is *the one* who is happy.
- Grammatically, these verses are bound together by the Hebrew word for **who/that** in verses 1a and 3b, **instead** in verse 2a, and the words **and** in verses 3a, 3c and 3d.
- The dominant emotion in the section is **admiration**, which is indicated in a number of ways:
 - The word **happy** opens the psalm
 - The word **delight** in verse 2
 - The image of a healthy and fruit-bearing **tree** in verse 3a-c.
 - The language of success in verse 3d.

VERSE 1

Expanded Paraphrase – the words in italics provide a fuller sense of the psalm; the text itself is in bold.

When someone's position in life is admirable and desirable, that person is declared "happy" (see 1 Kgs 10:8). Wicked people are sometimes declared "happy," since their position in life can seem admirable and desirable (see Mal 3:14-15). But I do not call the wicked "happy". Instead, I say, **Happy is the one who**, by the end of life's journey, **has not walked in the counsel of wicked people** and lived his life according to what wicked people say should or should not be done, **has not taken a stand in the way of sinful people** and committed to living a sinful lifestyle, **and has not settled in the dwelling place of insolent people** and adopted the character of an insolent person who mocks YHWH's instruction and those who follow it.

אֲשֶׁר-הָאֵלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר | לֹא הָלַךְ בְּעֵצַת רְשָׁעִים

וּבְדֶרֶךְ חַטָּאִים לֹא עָמַד
וּבְמוֹשָׁב לְצִים לֹא יָשָׁב:

1

Happy is the one who has not walked in the counsel of wicked people,
has not taken a stand in the way of sinful people,
and has not settled in the dwelling place of insolent people!

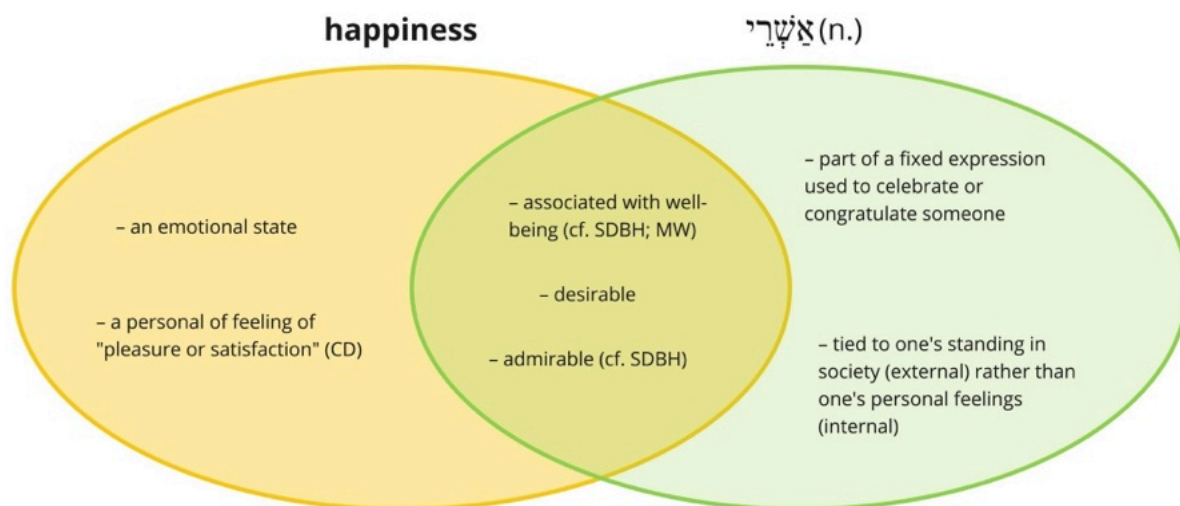
- Despite its appearance in most translations, the phrase **happy is the one** or *blessed is the one* is not a complete sentence in Hebrew. It is also not a claim that God will bless or reward someone who behaves well.² Rather, it is an *exclamation of admiration* for someone who makes good choices.
 - English has no expression that quite matches the phrase *happy is the one*, but it is similar to the exclamation *congratulations!*³ The French PDV translation correctly renders it as an exclamation, *Voici l'homme heureux ! (Here is the happy man!)*.
 - Translators should search for a similar expression in the local language. Bratcher and Reyburn point out that some languages may require a shift to the second person in order to convey congratulations; for example: *How happy you are* or *What great happiness is*

² Bratcher and Reyburn 2011, 16.

³ See 1 Kings 10:8.

yours. Also, they note that "In some languages the congratulation may be expressed more naturally at the end of the verse rather than at the beginning."⁴

- The key term **happy** (אֲשֶׁרִי) has several features to consider:
 - Based on the note above, translators should avoid a word that only describes an internal emotion rather than an external affirmation or circumstance.
 - People would declare someone **happy** (אֲשֶׁרִי) whose position in life was admirable or desirable. Possible alternatives include *joyous*, *commendable*, *favored*, or *blessed*. The meaning of the word chosen in the receptor language may be less important than the function of the phrase to express admiration and celebration.
 - The word is similar to the Hebrew word *blessed* (בֵּרֵךְ), which appears in Jer 17:7 with the same kind of tree imagery that is found in Psalm 1:3. There are just a few differences between the two words, though:
 - The word *blessed* is used as a "causative action by which deities grant a special favor to humans, objects, or events, or by which humans invoke a deity to do the same"⁵ (see Ps 118:26). 'Happy,' in contrast, does not invoke special favor so much as it describes or celebrates someone who is favored.
 - The word 'happy' is never used to describe God, only people. In contrast, the word *blessed* is used most often to describe God, and only sometimes people.
 - The word 'happy' means the same thing as the Greek word *makarios* (μακάριος) which Jesus used many times in the Beatitudes.⁶ Translators should harmonize the word here with that word that begins each verse of Matthew 5:3-11 in the target language.
 - Translators should try to avoid a word that includes the idea of *lucky*, as if the person's success is just by chance.⁷
 - The diagram below shows how the Hebrew word compares with our modern English idea of *happy*. The wording in the center shows the similarities between the two.



⁴ Bratcher and Reyburn 2011, 16.

⁵ SDBH.

⁶ The LXX translates this word in Psalm 1:1 as Μακάριος.

⁷ Bratcher and Reyburn 2011, 16.

- When Psalm 1 is read in isolation, **the one** (הַיָּחִיד) refers to a typical righteous person, so that its words can apply to anyone, whether male or female. Blessings that begin with **Happy is the...** (אַשְׁרֵי) usually apply to people generally, even if a masculine singular noun is used.⁸ At the same time, there are clues that 'the one' refers to a king, especially when the psalm is read within the context of Psalms 1-2 and within the book of Psalms as a whole. For a more detailed treatment of this issue, see [The Identity of the Person in Ps. 1:1](#).
 - When translating, choosing a word that is both gender neutral (such as *the one* instead of *the man*) and singular (such as *the one* instead of *those*) allows for a royal interpretation as well as a universal application.
 - Translations that use a plural noun ("happy are those") have the advantage of being clearly applicable to both males and females, but they do not allow for any understanding of *the one* as a unique individual. So, such a rendering is not preferred.
- 'The one' is celebrated, first, for what he does not do: **who has not walked...has not taken a stand... has not settled....** Most interpreters see a progression in bodily posture in this verse from walking (verse 1a) to standing (verse 1b) to sitting (verse 1c). But it is more likely that the psalmist is describing the progressive stages of a journey: setting out with directions (verse 1a), coming to a stop in the road (verse 1b), and settling down in a dwelling place (verse 1c).
 - Unless this imagery creates a barrier in the local language to understanding the meanings of each phrase (see the notes below), translators should seek to retain the images due to their concrete and highly memorable qualities.
 - The psalmist uses the language of a journey to talk about a person's character development. In the journey, the destination of 'the one' is determined by the guidance they follow.
 - In terms of significance, "the order of these verbs may indicate a gradual descent into evil, in which one first walks alongside, then stops, and ultimately takes up permanent residence in the company of the wicked."⁹
 - The three verbs 'has not walked...has not taken a stand... has not settled....' are rendered in most English translations in the present tense (*walks...stands...sits*). In Hebrew, however, the verbs are in a form that is past tense.¹⁰ The verse describes the type of person who has never done the actions listed. See NJPS for a modern English translation that correctly renders the verbs as present perfects (similarly to our translation): *Happy is the man who has not followed the counsel of the wicked, or taken the path of sinners, or joined the company of the insolent.*
- To **walk in the counsel of wicked people** (בְּעֵצַת רְשָׁעִים) is to live one's life according to the counsel, or advice, which wicked people offer.
 - In some languages, *walked in the counsel* may not be a natural expression. For example, the Hausa CLB says *followed the counsel*.¹¹ This rendering has the benefit of retaining the metaphor of a journey. "In some languages there are expressions such as 'to follow in the footsteps,' meaning to imitate the behavior of someone. In such cases the metaphor can

⁸ For example, Psalms 32:1-2; 34:9; 40:5; 41:2; 84:6, 13; 94:12; 127:5.

⁹ Auffret 2001, 259.

¹⁰ They are in the *qatal* form.

¹¹ *bin shawarar*.

appropriately be retained at least in part as 'who do not follow in the footprints of evil men.'¹²

- In some languages, a verbal idea may be best: *follow what wicked people advise others to do*.
- The word **wicked people** (רָשָׁעִים) occurs four times in Psalm 1 (verses 1, 4, 5, 6), which is more than any other word. It refers to the "state in which a person's behavior is inconsistent with the requirements of the law, either in a specific matter that is under dispute or as one's general mode of behavior."¹³
 - The translation *evil people* (GNB) is also acceptable.
 - Some translations render the word as a substantive adjective: "wicked" (NIV, NLT, ESV, NASB); "evil" (GNT); "ungodly" (KJV). Translators should ensure that their rendering makes it clear that the word refers to multiple people.
- The phrase **take a stand in the way of sinful people** means "to closely associate with sinners in their sinful behavior."¹⁴ It is "to share their way of life."¹⁵
 - The verb 'stand' (עמד) here has more of a sense of **take a stand** or *persist*¹⁶ than *stand around* or *stand still*.
 - In this psalm, the word 'way' (or *road*) is an image for one's lifestyle.
 - The phrase **sinful people** is a single word in Hebrew (חַטָּאִים, see also verse 5b). The word is very close in meaning to the previous term *wicked people* (רָשָׁעִים). The word *wicked* (רָשָׁעִים) emphasizes a person's bad state more than their bad actions. But the word *sinful* (חַטָּאִים) emphasizes a "pattern of actions" that is bad.¹⁷ "In the psalms, however, these two terms are often synonymous."¹⁸
- The basic meaning of the phrase **settled in the dwelling place of insolent people** is to *permanently join with insolent people*, that is, with mockers.
 - In some languages, a literal rendering of the phrase may not make sense. So, one African translation renders it *join with mockers*.¹⁹ Translators should also consider whether the audience is likely to take a literal rendering of the image **has not settled in the dwelling place of insolent people** to mean that they should never interact with, or live in the same communities with, people they consider to be "sinners," such as those from other religions

¹² Bratcher and Reyburn 2011, 16.

¹³ SDBH. See NIDOTTE: "Although the adj. can mean guilty, criminal, or godless, most often it serves as a reference to those who are characterized by wickedness... In the Psalter רָשָׁע designates the wicked person who stands diametrically opposed to the צַדִּיק, i.e., God's saints (37:28), those who love God (145:20), and those who wait on the Lord (32:10). In a word, he is the archenemy of the godly individual (68:2[3])

¹⁴ NET.

¹⁵ Anderson 1972, 59 (see Proverbs 1:10-19; Jer. 23:8).

¹⁶ "See Pss 33:11; 102:27; Eccl 1:4; 8:3; Lev 13:5; Jer 32:14; 48:11" (Seow 2013). Similarly, Wilson: "the verb עמד has more the sense of 'take a stand' than simply 'stand still.' There is volition (and therefore responsibility) assumed in this action" (Wilson 2002, 94). See BDB 764.3f: "persist"; HALOT 840.1: "to become involved with, or to persist in" (בדבר רע) Qoh 8:3"; DCH עמד (entry 8).

¹⁷ SDBH. "The nominal pattern of חַטָּאִים (sinners) signifies an occupation or a repeated action" (Waltke 2010:134; see IBHS, p. 89, P. 5.4a).

¹⁸ Wilson 2002, 95.

¹⁹ Hausa CLB.

or tribes. This is not the intended meaning of the image. However, translators should retain the imagery if it does not lead to misunderstanding.

- Many English translations render the noun **dwelling place** in Ps. 1:1 as *seat*, but it is more likely that the word here means a “location where a community... lives,” that is, a *dwelling place* (see footnote for explanation).²⁰
- Both the verb **settled** (יָשַׁב) and the word 'dwelling place' (מִוֶּשֶׁב) come from the same Hebrew root. But since the related noun in this clause means *dwelling place* and not *seat*, it is most likely that the verb here means *settled* or *dwelled*, and not *sat*.
- The Hebrew word rendered **insolent people** (לִצְיִים) can also be translated as *scoffers*²¹ or *mockers*.²² It refers to those who show "contempt for other people and ideas."²³
 - By way of comparison, the words 'wicked people' and 'sinful people' do not emphasize contempt for other people and ideas. Rather, the word 'wicked people' (רָשָׁעִים) emphasizes a person's bad state, while the word 'sinful people' (חַטָּאִים) emphasizes a "pattern of actions" that is bad.²⁴
 - So, there is an intensification of wickedness in this verse, as a wicked state leads to sinful actions that leads to contempt for others.
 - The local language may express the idea of a mocker as someone who does a certain gesture, such as "shake the finger, 'wag the head,' or 'make faces.'"²⁵ Translators should be careful that the word chosen here is not considered obscene in the local culture.
 - The CEV translation, *sneering at God*, is too narrow. Mockers may insult God, but they may also insult people. So, translators might say *sneering at God and people*.

VERSE 2

Expanded Paraphrase - the words in italics provide a fuller sense of the psalm; the text itself is in bold.

Instead of receiving instruction for life's journey from wicked people, he receives instruction from YHWH. And **his delight is in the instruction of YHWH, and because he delights in it, he meditates on his instruction day and night.** And so he lives life's journey according to YHWH's instruction, walking on the way of the righteous and forming a character shaped by YHWH's instruction.

כִּי אִם בְּתוֹרַת יְהוָה חֲפָצוֹ וּבְתוֹרַתוֹ יִהְיֶה יוֹמָם וּלְיָלָה:	2	Instead, his delight is in YHWH's instruction, and he meditates on his instruction day and night.
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²⁰ In Hebrew, one does not sit *in* (ב) a seat but *on* (עַל) it. Since Ps 1:1 uses the word *in*, *dwelling place* is more appropriate. This is a very common usage of the word; for example, in Ex 12:20 it refers to Israel's dwelling in Egypt. See [SDBH](#) for definitions; also see Lev 3:17; 23:3, 14, 21, 31; Ex 10:23; Ezek 34:13.

²¹ NASB, ESV, NET.

²² NIV, NLT.

²³ [SDBH](#).

²⁴ [SDBH](#). "The nominal pattern of חַטָּאִים (sinners) signifies an occupation or a repeated action" (Waltke 2010, 134; see IBHS, p. 89, P. 5.4a).

²⁵ Bratcher and Reyburn 1991, 17.

- Psalm 1:2 continues to celebrate the one who follows **YHWH's instruction** instead of following the guidance of wicked people.
 - This verse has strong connections with Joshua 1:8, which says, "Do not let this book of *instruction* depart from your mouth; *meditate* on it *day and night*." The words *instruction*, *meditate*, *day*, and *night* should be translated the same way in Joshua 1:8 and in Psalm 1:2.
- The negative statements in verse 1 transition into positive statements in verse 2.
 - The word **instead** (כִּי אֲזַם) marks the transition. The word "has the effect of 'but rather,' expressing an appropriate alternative to what has preceded."²⁶ Moreover, the psalmist uses this particular Hebrew term to make it very clear that the following idea is the only other possible choice a person could make.²⁷ In other words, either one follows the counsel of wicked people (verse 1) or one follows the instruction of YHWH (verse 2); there is no middle ground. In translation, "the contrast between what precedes and what follows should be clear and emphatic."²⁸
 - The strong contrast is further indicated by the word order of verse 2. In both lines of the verse, the phrases **in YHWH's instruction** and **on his instruction** are out of the usual order. They are placed at the front of their clauses. This emphasizes that 'YHWH's instruction' replaces the things in verse 1 that were not good to do: not *this*, but *that*.
 - If possible, translators should seek to indicate this emphasis. Some languages can show emphasis through word order or tone. Some languages can show emphasis by splitting the sentence to put emphasis on one part of it, for example: *it is in the instruction of YHWH that he delights* and *it is his instruction that he rehearses day and night*.²⁹
- The first two pronouns **his** (in the phrase **his delight**) and **he** (in the phrase **he meditates**) refer to 'the one' from verse 1. The third pronoun **his** (in **his instruction**) refers to **YHWH**. In some languages, it may be necessary to substitute the appropriate proper noun in place of the pronoun.
- The phrase **his delight is in YHWH's instruction** has several important features:
 - In Hebrew, the word order of the phrase is *in the instruction of YHWH (is) his delight*.
 - The preposition **in** (בְּ) is significant, since it is the same preposition that occurred three times in verse 1 ("*in* the counsel... *in* the pathway... *in* the dwelling place"). The delight of "the one" is not *in* these things (verse 1), but exclusively and totally "*in* the instruction of YHWH" (verse 2).
 - The key word **instruction** (תּוֹרָה) is rendered in a variety of ways in English translations, such as *law* (KJV, NIV, NLT, ESV, NEB), *Law* (GNT), *instruction* (CSB, ISV), *Teaching* (CEV), *teachings* (GWT), and *commands* (NET).
 - The phrase **YHWH's instruction** (תּוֹרַת יְהוָה) probably refers, at the very least, to the written Law of Moses, that is, the first five books of the Old Testament (Genesis to

²⁶ Wilson 2002, 95.

²⁷ BHRG §40.29.2.

²⁸ Bratcher and Reyburn 1991, 17. For example, "Instead" (CSB, CEV, GNT, NET) or "Rather" (GWT).

²⁹ This is known as a *cleft construction*.

Deuteronomy, also called the *Pentateuch*).³⁰ But it is also likely that the Psalmist had more biblical books in mind than just the first five books.³¹ Importantly, this instruction was not only written down, but also spoken aloud.

- Furthermore, it is instruction *from* God, not just instruction *about* God. In translation, try to avoid words that convey merely the idea of legal rules set forth by officials. Instead, the idea of *instruction/teaching* should be a part of the word chosen in translation.
- For languages that need to render the phrase as a verbal idea, *the instruction YHWH gives* or *what YHWH instructs* are possibilities.
- In Psalm 1, where the symbol of a journey is so dominant, it may be significant that the word *instruction* (תּוֹרָה) is related to a Hebrew verb (יָרָה) which "occurs in such practical contexts as the giving of directions in travel (Gen 46:28)."³² Indeed, *instruction* (תּוֹרָה) is often associated with the image of walking on a pathway.³³
- **YHWH** is God's proper name (as opposed to a title such as *lord*), which he commanded his people to call him in Exodus 3:15. For more guidance about how to translate this name, see the "Names/Titles of God" document.
- The word **delight** (תִּשְׂמֹחַ) or *pleasure*³⁴ refers to a "state in which humans feel emotionally attached to a particular event" or thing.³⁵
 - The word 'delight' (תִּשְׂמֹחַ) is a noun. So, in Hebrew, the phrase *in the instruction of YHWH (is) his delight* actually contains no verb (it is a **verbless clause**). The translator has two main options for how to translate the clause:
 - The translator may supply the verb *is*.
 - The translator may render 'delight' as a verb. This is the strategy of several English translations: *he delights*³⁶ or *he finds pleasure*.³⁷
 - In some languages, a person cannot delight in a noun. Instead, a person delights in doing something. In this case, a possible rendering is *he delights in keeping God's teachings*.³⁸ Words like *keeping* or *obeying* fit the overall context of the psalm, which emphasizes obedience. This is preferred over renderings like *he delights in reading God's law*,³⁹ which emphasizes literacy.
- Here are some things to consider when translating the phrase **he meditates on his instruction day and night**:

³⁰ "At least for the postexilic period, תּוֹרַת יְהוָה was regularly associated with a law of Moses, sometimes specified as written. Such a reading would also fit quite well with Psalm 1:2, not least if taking Joshua 1:8 into consideration" (Willgren 2018).

³¹ Botha 2005.

³² NIDOTTE.

³³ See Seow 2013. Exodus 16:4; 2 Kings 10:31; Isaiah 2:3; 42:24; Psalms 119:1, 29.

³⁴ NET.

³⁵ SDBH.

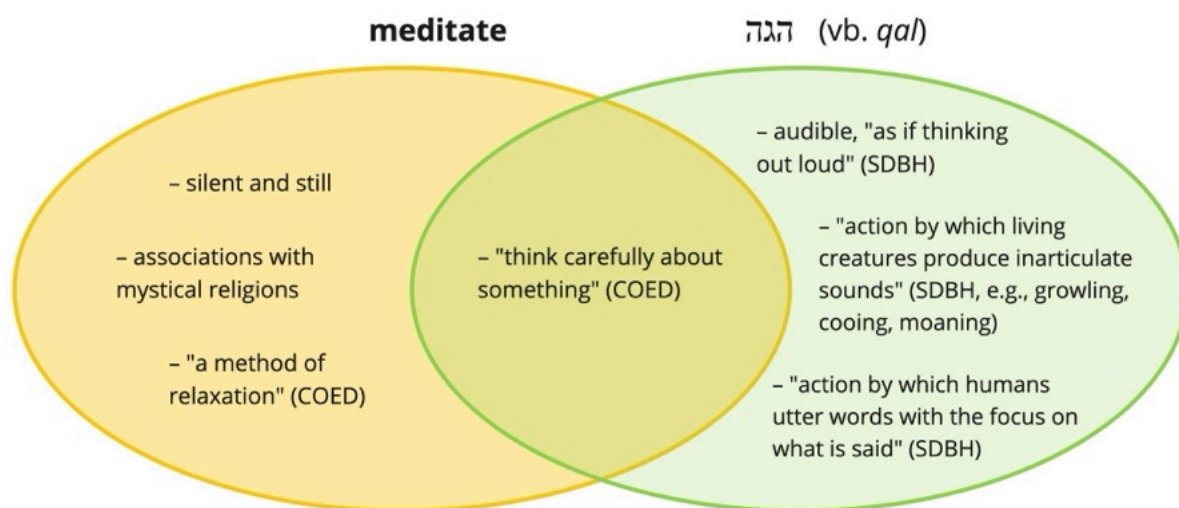
³⁶ GWT, ISV; see NLT: *they delight*.

³⁷ NET; see GNT *they find joy*.

³⁸ Hausa Common Language Bible.

³⁹ Hausa Littafi Mai Tsarki 1979.

- The verb **meditates**⁴⁰ (הִתְחַלֵּץ) can also be rendered as *studies*,⁴¹ but the word does not imply a need for literacy, and translators should avoid rendering the word as though it means *reads*.
- The Hebrew word means to speak softly to oneself as if thinking out loud.⁴² The Spanish BTX accurately renders it *whispers* (*susurra*), but the emphasis here is on the thought process rather than the act of making sounds. So, a translation that implies whispering is a requirement for believers is not recommended.
- As it is used here, the Hebrew word implies that the person is engaged in intense, deep thinking.⁴³ A possible rendering is *continually learns from* or *is continually learning from*.
 - Though some translations render this word as *thinks*,⁴⁴ in oral cultures it is important to emphasize the *speaking* aspect of the word also, if possible. On the other hand, renderings like *recites*⁴⁵ or *repeats*⁴⁶ may denote speaking without any kind of deep thought. So, translators may need to supply two words or more to communicate the full idea of the Hebrew term, such as *recites thoughtfully* or *meditates aloud*. One possible strategy is that of the French PDV, which has *repeats...in his heart* (*redit...dans son cœur*).
 - See the Venn diagram below for a more detailed look at the Hebrew understanding of the root word (green circle on the right), our modern English understanding of the idea (yellow circle on the left), and what the two understandings have in common (the middle section where the two circles intersect).



- The phrase **day and night** (יוֹמָם וָלַיְלָה) is a Hebrew expression that means *continually*.⁴⁷ Interestingly, just after Psalm 1, Psalms 3-14 are structured in a "day-night" pattern.⁴⁸ We advise that translators retain the 'day and night' imagery, if possible.

⁴⁰ KJV, NIV, NLT, ESV, NASB, CSB.

⁴¹ GNT; see LXX μελετάω ("study").

⁴² SDBH.

⁴³ Bratcher and Reyburn 1991, 18.

⁴⁴ Hausa CLB.

⁴⁵ TOB.

⁴⁶ NBS.

⁴⁷ BDB 401.2. See Exodus 13:21; Joshua 1:8; 1 Kings 8:59; Psalms 1:2; 32:4; etc.

⁴⁸ Ho 2019; see Barbiero 2003.

VERSE 3

Expanded Paraphrase – the words in italics provide a fuller sense of the psalm; the text itself is in bold.

And YHWH's instruction leads him ultimately to life in YHWH's life-giving presence, symbolized by the Garden of Eden (see Gen 2; Ps 36:8-10). And so I say of the person who rejects wickedness and chooses to follow YHWH's instruction that **he will become like a life-giving tree** in YHWH's garden (see Pss 52:10; 92:13-15; Ezek 47:12), a tree that has been removed from a waterless place, where it could not flourish, and **transplanted** by YHWH **on water channels** which YHWH dug to irrigate the trees in his garden. These water channels represent YHWH's instruction, which daily nourishes a person so that he becomes like a well-watered tree **that gives its fruit in its season** for others to eat and enjoy, **and whose leaves**, a source of shade and healing (see Ezek 47:12) **do not wither**. And **he** that is, the person, but ultimately, YHWH **will cause all that he does to flourish** just as a healthy tree flourishes.

<p>וְהָיָה כְּעֵץ שְׂתוּל עַל-פְּלִי מַיִם אֲשֶׁר פָּרִיו יִתֵּן בְּעֵתוֹ וְעָלְהוּ לֹא-יִבּוֹל וְכָל אֲשֶׁר-יַעֲשֶׂה יִצְלִחַ:</p>	3	<p>And he will become like a tree transplanted beside water channels, that gives its fruit in its season, and whose leaves do not wither, and he will cause all that he does to flourish.</p>
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- Psalm 1:3 continues to celebrate the one who, as a result of his devotion to God's instruction, will become like a flourishing tree in God's garden.
 - This verse has many connections with the beginning of Jeremiah 17:8, which says, "And he will become like a tree transplanted beside water..." The only difference between the two phrases is Psalm 1:3 includes the word *streams*. Translators should use the same vocabulary to render the similar Hebrew words in these two verses.
 - The garden imagery in Psalm 1 is similar to descriptions of Eden and the temple of God.⁴⁹
- Many translations render the verb **he will become** (וְהָיָה) in the present tense (NIV, NLT, ESV, CSB, CEV, GNT, NET, NEB). But if the poet wanted to say "he is like a tree," then he did not need to use a verb at all in Hebrew. Also, when this verb is used in as an ordinary verb, as it is here, it typically refers "to events that are projected in the future."⁵⁰
- The phrase **like a tree** (כְּעֵץ) compares 'the one' to a tree:
 - The word rendered **tree** is a generic word for tree or wood, and does not refer to any specific type of tree. In Psalm 1, the image is that of a cultivated agricultural setting such as a garden, rather than a tree in the wild.
 - Trees are symbols of kings in the Bible (see Daniel 4:7-9, 17-19; Psalm 52:10).⁵¹

⁴⁹ See Psalm 92:14: "They are transplanted in YHWH's house; they flourish in the courts of our God;" Psalm 52:10: "I am like a flourishing olive tree in God's house." See Creach 1999.

⁵⁰ BHRG §40.24. The other way to use this verb would be as a discourse marker, but that is not how it is being used here.

⁵¹ "In both biblical and ancient Near Eastern tradition, the individual most typically identified with a tree is a person of royalty" (Brown 2002, 69; see Osbourne 2018). In Dan. 4, King Nebuchadnezzar is depicted as a massive tree that provides shelter and food to all kinds of creatures (Dan. 4:7-9, 17-19). In Ps. 52, King David is depicted as a "flourishing olive tree in God's house" (Ps. 52:10).

- The description **transplanted beside water channels** (שָׁתוּל עַל-פְּלִיגֵי מַיִם) has some important features:
 - Although most English translations use the word *planted* here,⁵² the word **transplanted** may be more accurate. The Hebrew word used here is not the typical verb for *plant* (נָטַע). The overall description of the tree in Psalm 1 "is not the picture of a tree growing naturally beside a river, but of a tree planted (better 'transplanted') by a gardener beside a watercourse or irrigation channel."⁵³
 - The most important point, though, is that the tree did not just grow beside the streams naturally (unlike the translation of the GNT). Instead, the tree has been put beside the streams of water *by someone on purpose*. The translator should attempt to find a way to make the intentionality of the planting/transplanting clear.
 - For languages in which the passive voice will not work, translators may consider rendering the verb in the active sense: *someone transplanted* or *a gardener transplanted*.
 - The phrase **water channels** (פְּלִיגֵי מַיִם) probably refers to man-made streams or irrigated channels of water, as opposed to natural ones.⁵⁴
 - Thus, the overall image is that someone has done the hard work of digging channels and supplying them with water to create streams, and then that person has purposefully taken a tree and planted it by the streams they have created.⁵⁵ The image is one of someone taking great care to help the tree to have health and life.
 - The common translation "streams of water" mistakenly implies a naturally occurring water source.
 - Within the psalm, the 'water channels' are meant as an image of YHWH's instruction. Just as water supplies life for the tree to grow and thrive, so too YHWH's word gives life to the righteous person.
 - The phrase 'transplanted beside water channels' sounds similar in Hebrew to the words *he rehearses... day and night* (יְהִיזָּה יוֹמָם וָלַיְלָה) in the previous line of the psalm (verse 2). The effect of these similar-sounding phrases⁵⁶ is to draw a connection between the act of meditating on YHWH's instruction (verse 2b) and the water channels that nourish the tree (verse 3a). Translators and performers might consider ways of making a subtle connection between these two phrases.
- The initial description of the tree is followed by a list of what the tree does: **it gives its fruit in its season** and **its leaf does not wither**.

⁵² NIV, ESV, NRSV, NLT, CSB, NET, NCV.

⁵³ Rogerson & McKay 1977, 17. See the instruction of Amen-em-opet, which contrasts the impulsive person who is "like a tree growing in the open," with the silent person who is "like a tree growing in a garden. It flourishes and doubles its yield; It (stands) before its lord. Its fruit is sweet; its shade is pleasant; and its end is reached in the garden..." (ANET 421f.)

⁵⁴ HALOT. See Keefer 2020. Contrast NLT: "planted along the riverbank."

⁵⁵ "Unlike trees growing wild...or planted in the fields, where the amount of rainfall varies, the tree" in Psalm 1 "has been planted purposefully" beside "irrigation canals, artificial water-channels made for the purpose of irrigation (see Proverbs 21:1; Eccl. 2:5-6; Isa. 30:25)." VanGemeren 1991, 56.

⁵⁶ The poetic feature is known as *alliteration*.

- The word **it/its** in the phrases **it gives**, **its fruit**, and **its leaf** refer to the tree, while the word **its** in the phrase **its season** probably refers to the fruit.
- The word 'season' refers to a specific time of the year that a tree is expected to produce fruit.
- Each of these phrases in Hebrew uses a word order that is similar to checking off items on a list: "As for its fruit: it gives it in its season; as for its leaf: it does not wither."
- Both phrases show that the tree is healthy and thriving, thanks to abundant water from the streams. The image of giving its fruit also indicates that the tree is a blessing to others.
- The final line of verse 3 is **and he will cause all that he does to flourish** (וְכָל אֲשֶׁר-יַעֲשֶׂה יִצְלִיחַ), that is, *and he makes all that he does successful*. This line presents some of the most difficult exegetical and translation issues in the psalm.
 - One question is, how do the words in the phrase fit together?
 - Some translations, like NIV, render it: *all that he does is successful*.⁵⁷ For technical reasons, this rendering is unlikely to be correct (see footnote for more detail).⁵⁸
 - Other translations, like NLT, ESV, and NASB render it: *he is successful in all that he does*.⁵⁹ While this is better than the NIV rendering, it is not the best option.
 - The rendering 'he will cause all that he does to flourish' is the most likely one based upon other Biblical passages with similar expressions.⁶⁰ In particular, this is the best way to understand the similar expression in Joshua 1:8. As we have already seen in the notes on verse 2, Joshua 1:8 has strong connections with Psalm 1.⁶¹
 - Another important question is, who does the word **he**, which appears twice in this phrase, refer to?
 - Based on grammar alone, the word could refer to either the man or the tree in both places.⁶² In other words, *the person causes all that he (the man) does to be successful or the tree causes all that it (the tree) does to be successful*.
 - Or, the subject of the verb might be YHWH, who is the cause of all success (in other words, *YHWH makes successful all that the man/tree does*).⁶³
 - The word probably refers mainly to a person, since this fits with the strong allusion to Joshua 1:8 (see above). So, the meaning is that *the person makes all that he does successful*.

⁵⁷ In this understanding, *all that he does* is the subject. This is the rendering of the NIV, Darby, Douay-Rheims, RV, KJV, and most French, German and Russian translations.

⁵⁸ The verb הִצְלִיחַ in the *hiphil* stem is rarely (if ever) used intransitively with an impersonal subject. If the subject is impersonal, then the verb (צִלַּח) appears in the *qal* stem (for example, Jeremiah 12:1; Numbers 14:41; Isaiah 53:10; 54:17).

⁵⁹ In this understanding, *all that he does* is an adverbial modifier. This is the rendering of the NLT, ESV, NASB, CSB, CEV, GNT, NET, and JPS.

⁶⁰ Ps. 37:7; Deut. 28:29; Isa. 48:15; especially 2 Chron. 7:11.

⁶¹ In Joshua 1:8, which has a similar construction, the verb is transitive ("make successful"); Joshua is the subject, and "your pathway" is the object.

⁶² The verb *does* (עָשָׂה) can refer to the activity of a people or trees (Gen 1:11-12; Isa 5:2,4,10; 37:31; see Seow 2013). Similarly, the subject of the main clause (*he makes successful*) is also ambiguous, since the verb צִלַּח may refer to the flourishing of a person or a tree.

⁶³ See Gen. 39:3, 23.

- However, the choice is not certain, and the psalmist probably intended it that way. It is probable that the psalmist meant the word to apply equally to a person, a tree, or God.
- In the Bible, the verb **cause...to flourish** (יָצַח) often describes success on a journey.⁶⁴ "So the poet's choice of the word...keeps the dominant metaphor of a journey in view."

⁶⁴ For example, see Josh. 1:8; Jer. 12:1; Judg. 18:5.

Gray boxes discuss sections and subsections. The headings (in green) are guides, and not part of the Biblical text.

VERSES 4-5: Not so the wicked people

- The phrase **Not so** that begins verse 4 marks a major contrast and division in the psalm.
- The subject of the psalm changes in verses 4-5 to focus on **the wicked people**.
 - The full definite article (*the*) only occurs in the psalm in verses 1 and 4, as a way to poetically introduce the section describing *the one* who is happy (verses 1-3) and then to introduce the section describing *the wicked people* (verses 4-5).
 - This usage of the article indicates that the psalmist intended a direct contrast between *the happy one* and *the wicked people*. Translators may use similar poetic conventions in the target language to emphasize this contrast.
- In contrast to the image of a healthy **tree** in verse 3, the image in verse 4 is of **chaff**, that is, the dead and worthless part of a grain harvest.
- The predominant emotion in this section is **contempt**. This emotion comes from:
 - The image of **chaff blown away by the wind** (verse 4b)
 - The description of the wicked as those who will not survive in judgment (verse 5a)
 - The description of the wicked as those who will not remain with the righteous (verse 5b).

VERSE 4

Expanded Paraphrase - the words in *italics* provide a fuller sense of the psalm; the text itself is in bold.

Not so the wicked people! *Why would anyone consider them "happy"? They do not meditate on YHWH's instruction, and so they will not, in the end, flourish like trees in YHWH's garden. **Instead**, when the time of threshing and winnowing comes, **they will be like chaff that**, thrown up into the air with a winnowing fork, **the wind drives away** from the threshing floor. Just as chaff grows together with the grain in a field, so the wicked currently live together with the righteous. But the day is coming when YHWH will execute judgment and separate the wicked from the righteous, just as chaff is separated from grain at the harvest.*

לֹא-כֵן הַרְשָׁעִים כִּי אִם-כַּמֶּזֶץ אֲשֶׁר-תִּדְכֶנּוּ רֶגֶל:	4	Not so the wicked people! Instead, they will be like chaff that the wind drives away.
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- The first line says **Not so the wicked people** (לֹא-כֵן הַרְשָׁעִים). This phrase creates a strong, sudden contrast with everything mentioned in verses 1-3.⁶⁵
 - Translations that render this line as an exclamation capture the strength and sudden nature of the contrast well. Examples include: *Not so the wicked!* (NIV); *But not the wicked!* (NLT); *Not so with the wicked!* (NET).
 - The word **so** (כֵּן; which is an adverb) "refers to the whole description of the righteous in verses 1-3."⁶⁶ Unlike the righteous people, the wicked people are *not* to be considered happy

⁶⁵ See Jacobson (2014, 62): "This stanza begins on a sharply disjunctive note: Not so the wicked! The Hebrew *lō' kēn* provides a harsh transition..."

⁶⁶ Bratcher and Reyburn 1991, 20.

or commendable (verse 1a), because they do not follow YHWH's instruction (verse 2), and they are not like a tree (verse 3).

- In Hebrew, this line resembles the opening phrase of the psalm (*happy is the one*, אֲשֶׁרִי הָאִישׁ) both in terms of sound⁶⁷ and grammar.⁶⁸ But the opening line that describes *the one* contains seven words (verse 1a),⁶⁹ while in contrast, the opening line for *the wicked people* has only two Hebrew words. The use of fewer words to describe the wicked people is probably intentional. Poetically, it weakens or reduces the wicked people within the psalm.⁷⁰
- See the notes on verse 1 for more detail on **the wicked people** (הַרְשָׁעִים).
- The conjunction **instead** (כִּי אֲמַן) is the same Hebrew phrase as the one at the beginning of verse 2. In Hebrew, the repetition may be on purpose. In fact, several small words in the psalm create parallels between the description of the wicked people and the description of the righteous people. They are:
 - **not** (לֹא) in verse 1 and verse 4a,
 - 'instead' (כִּי אֲמַן) in verse 2 and here in verse 4b,
 - **like** (כִּי) in verse 3 and verse 4b.⁷¹
- In Hebrew, verse 4b has no verb, which is common in Hebrew (it is a *verbless clause*). We have supplied the words **they will be**. Most translations use a present tense verb in translation (*they are*).⁷² But verse 4b is in parallel with verse 3a, which is best understood as *he will become like a tree*. Since the verb has a future tense in verse 3a, this suggests reading verse 4b with a future tense also.
- The phrase **like chaff that the wind drives away** (כַּמֶּזֶץ אֲשֶׁר־תִּדְּפֶנּוּ רֵיחַ) is an image that refers to a process well-known in farming called *winnowing*:
 - When crops are harvested, they contain both 1) the grain and 2) the grain's lightweight shell or other lightweight parts of the plant that humans cannot eat. These lightweight parts are called **chaff**. To remove the chaff, "the mixture is thrown into the air with a ... fork or shovel. The wind blows the light husks away ... and the grain falls back to the floor to be collected."⁷³ This process is called *winnowing*.
 - If the local language does not have an equivalent word for 'chaff,' then consider using a word or descriptive phrase for something familiar from the realm of agriculture or plants that is lightweight and without value, and that could easily be blown away by the wind, such as *dry grass*, *dead leaves*, etc.⁷⁴ In particular, *dead leaves* would contrast nicely with thriving leaves of the tree (verse 3; see SEB). Also, bear in mind that winnowing and chaff

⁶⁷ Note the similar consonants (ע-ש-ר / ר-ש-ר) as well as the similar pattern of stressed vowels (*ashre haish* // *lo-ken haresha'im*).

⁶⁸ The full definite article (הַ) occurs only in verse 1a (הָאִישׁ) and verse 4a (הַרְשָׁעִים).

⁶⁹ The Leningrad Codex has only six words, since אֲשֶׁר־יִהְיֶה־אִישׁ are joined by *maqfef*. The Aleppo Codex, however, has seven words.

⁷⁰ Seow 2013.

⁷¹ See Auffret 1978.

⁷² For example: NIV, NLT, ESV, NASB, CSB, CEV, GNT, NET.

⁷³ Ryken 1998, "Chaff."

⁷⁴ Bratcher and Reyburn 1991, 20.

are a recurring theme in Scripture, so it might be necessary to introduce a new concept to your audience. An easy way to do this is add a short descriptor into the translation: for example, *chaff, the worthless part of the grain*. Or, translators may provide a footnote and/or illustration.

- 'Chaff' is an image involving plants, and it contrasts with the image of the healthy tree in the previous verse (verse 3).
- Most importantly, the Bible normally uses the image of 'chaff' to indicate judgment.⁷⁵ In fact, the next verse (verse 5) clearly speaks about judgment. Just like chaff is separated from grain at the harvest, so too the wicked people will be separated from the righteous people in the judgment. The UBS *Handbook* asserts that "the main point of the comparison is the worthlessness of the chaff."⁷⁶ While worthlessness may be an important part of the comparison, the most important part is the fact that chaff, which grows together with grain for a season, is separated from the grain in the harvest.⁷⁷

VERSE 5

Expanded Paraphrase - the words in *italics* provide a fuller sense of the psalm; the text itself is in **bold**.

Therefore, *because wicked people will be like chaff that is separated from the grain and blown away*, **wicked people will not stand firm in the judgment**. *When YHWH judges between the wicked and the righteous, they will not be able to escape YHWH's verdict and sentence. Unable to stand firm, they will be "blown away," removed from the land and from YHWH's life-giving presence.* **And sinful people [will not be declared righteous and stand] in the group of righteous people**, *because YHWH is just and will never declare the guilty to be righteous.*

עֲלֵיכֶן לֹא־יִקְמוּ רָשָׁעִים בְּמִשְׁפָּט אֲתָשָׁאִים בַּעֲדַת צְדִיקִים:	5	Therefore, wicked people will not stand firm in the judgment, and sinful people [will not stand] in the group of righteous people.
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- Psalm 1:5 is about the time of final judgment. Based on the previous comparison of the wicked people to the chaff, this verse concludes that the wicked people will not remain with the **righteous people**. The wicked people will be separated and will not survive.
- The word **Therefore** (עֲלֵיכֶן) is used here "to explain the grounds of why something... will happen."⁷⁸ It points back to the image of chaff in verse 4 as the reason why wicked people will not stand firm in the judgment. Verse 5 explains that, just like chaff is removed from grain at the harvest, so too the wicked people will be removed from the righteous people in judgment.

⁷⁵ See Malachi 3:18; Zephaniah 2:2.

⁷⁶ Bratcher and Reyburn 1991, 20. See NLT: "like worthless chaff."

⁷⁷ So, for example, Ross: "The figure shows that the ungodly are not only of no value, but also will eventually be removed" (Ross 2011, 191). "The simile describes the destiny of the wicked (see verses 5-6)" (NET).

⁷⁸ BHRG §40.38.1d.

- Some translations (such as NLT, GNB, and CEV) do not represent the word 'therefore' here, but this may reflect a misunderstanding of how the Biblical authors and most non-Western cultures engage in reasoning. Translators should bear in mind that the Bible often uses concrete parables and examples from everyday life to make the case for important theological truths. That is what is happening here, as the psalmist makes the case from farming to explain how God will judge humanity. So, it is very important to include the word *therefore* here.
- Other translation possibilities for the word 'therefore' are *that is why* (GWT), *for this reason* (NET), *and so...*, or *on account of this*.⁷⁹
- The verb rendered **stand firm** (עָמַד), can mean: a) *to stand up or to rise*, b) *to stand (to keep standing)*, c) *to prevail (in a judgment)*. It is a different Hebrew word from the word for 'taken a stand' in verse 1. Since the verb 'stand firm' is paired with the word **the judgment** in this verse, the most important sense here is c) *to prevail or to survive*.
 - The NJV translates the verb as *survive*, and the NET renders it *withstand*. In some cultures, the idea of standing or surviving in judgment may not work. For example, the Hausa CLB translation says, *the wicked will not escape judgment*.⁸⁰ However, renderings such as *stand firm*, *prevail*, or *survive* are preferred, if possible.
 - Some translations render the phrase **the wicked will not stand firm** as *God will judge wicked people*.⁸¹ While this rendering gets at the most basic sense of the phrase, it misses something important about the wording of the Hebrew. The Hebrew implies the background idea that *a person may think that the wicked will survive the judgment*. The phrase 'the wicked will not stand firm' directly refutes this thought. It is a statement against a doubt that a person could have about the fairness of God's judgment. Furthermore, this rendering implies that God will not judge righteous people, which is not the case. God will not punish righteous people; but all will be judged. Finally, retaining the language of 'standing' here tightens the connection with 'standing' in verse 1: the righteous person does not stand in the way of sinful people, and the wicked will not stand in the judgment.
- The key word 'the judgment' (בְּיִשְׁפָּט) does not refer to just any trial or judgment that a person could experience in life. Rather, it refers to *the* final Judgment in which God will judge all of humanity. For our reasoning behind this interpretation, see the footnote below.⁸²

⁷⁹ Bratcher and Reyburn 1991, 20.

⁸⁰ Hausa Common Language Bible: *Masu mugunta ba za su ku'buta daga hukunci ba*.

⁸¹ Hausa Littafi Mai Tsarki 1979: *Allah kuwa zai hukunta mugaye*.

⁸² In Hebrew, the word **judgment** has the definite article (translated **the**). The wicked people have just been compared to chaff (verse 4), and the next verse (verse 6) says that the way of the wicked people will perish or will come to an end. Psalm 1 appears between Malachi 3 and Psalm 2 in the traditional ordering of the Hebrew Bible, so that the immediate context of Psalm 1 is a final judgment: Malachi 3 predicts that wicked people will become like chaff in *the* Judgment (Mal. 3:19-21) and encourages righteous people to remember YHWH's instruction (תורה; Mal. 3:22; see Ps. 1:2). Psalm 2, which describes the final Judgment, uses many of the same terms as in Psalm 1, including the word *perish* (Ps 1:6, 2:11). For a more detailed discussion of this issue, see [The Meaning of מִשְׁפָּט in Ps. 1:5](#).

- The line **and sinful people [will not stand] in the group of righteous people** has some important features:
 - The **sinful people** (חַטָּאִים) in verse 5b refers to the same people as the **wicked people** in verse 5a. "[Translators] should be certain that the text does not imply that the two lines speak of two different groups."⁸³ Here, the word 'sinful people' should be translated the same way as it is in verse 1 (where it is part of the phrase 'does not stand in the way of sinful people').
 - The line has no verb, but the verb **will not stand** from the previous line is supposed to apply to this line also. This terseness is a very common technique in Hebrew poetry.⁸⁴
 - Many languages will need to supply a verb here. If possible, the verb from the previous line should be chosen. In some languages, one line or the other may require a different verb to fit the context of each line. For example, *escape judgment...get a place* (Hausa CLB).
- The phrase **the group of righteous people** (בְּעֵצַת צְדִיקִים) refers to God's people who remain "after the godless have been separated out" as a result of the final Judgment.⁸⁵
 - The word **righteous people** (צְדִיקִים) is the direct opposite of **wicked people** (רָשָׁעִים). Both words are plural adjectives in Hebrew that are used to describe people. The righteous people have chosen to live righteously, obey YHWH, and delight in his Torah; basically, they are like the man described in verses 1-3!
 - Some English translations render the word **the group** as *the congregation* (ESV, LEB, NRSV). The translator should be careful not to translate the word in a way that specifically refers to a church or the nation of Israel.
 - The key term **righteous** refers to a "state in which a person's or deity's behavior [fully matches] ... the requirements of the law, either in a specific matter ... or as one's general mode of behavior."
 - Instead of *righteous*, translators could use *faithful people* or *those who obey YHWH*.
 - The word does not mean *holy* or *religious*.
 - In Hebrew, the phrase 'the group of righteous people' (בְּעֵצַת צְדִיקִים) sounds very similar to the phrase 'the counsel of wicked people' (בְּעֵצַת רָשָׁעִים) in verse 1. In addition to the similarity in sound, both phrases are preceded by a motion verb (verse 1a: 'walk'; verse 5b: 'take a stand') and the negative term 'not' (לֹא). "The similar wording is intended to drive home the fact that the one who enjoys the 'counsel of the wicked' will ultimately be cut off from any association with the 'assembly of the righteous.'"⁸⁶ (See more on this feature [here](#).) The connection may also function to bind together the body of the psalm (verses 1-5) before the final summary in verse 6.⁸⁷

⁸³ Bratcher and Reyburn 1991, 20.

⁸⁴ This phenomenon of *verb gapping* is common in Hebrew poetry; Watson 2005, 48; O'Connor 1980, 122f.

⁸⁵ Baethgen 1904, 3. See Briggs: "the congregation after the judgment of the resurrection" (7).

⁸⁶ Wilson 2002, 98.

⁸⁷ This binding of the section may be a kind of *inclusio*.

Gray boxes discuss sections and subsections. The headings (in green) are guides, and not part of the Biblical text.

VERSE 6: **Because YHWH**

- This verse is the only time in the psalm that YHWH is clearly the subject of a clause (in verse 6a).
- The verse summarizes verses 1-5 in two parts:
 - The first clause of verse 6 summarizes the first section of the psalm, that is, verses 1-3
 - The second clause of verse 6 summarizes the second section of the psalm, that is, verses 4-5.
- Verses 1-5 are bound together, leaving verse 6 distinct:
 - Verse 1 contained the phrase 'the counsel of the wicked.' In Hebrew, this phrase sounds very similar to the phrase 'the group of righteous people' in verse 5. These similar-sounding phrases poetically signal the beginning of a unit in verse 1 and the end of the unit in verse 5.

VERSE 6

Expanded Paraphrase - the words in *italics* provide a fuller sense of the psalm; the text itself is in **bold**.

Here, then, is the reason why I declare the righteous, and not the wicked, to be "happy:" **Because YHWH cares for the way of righteous people, and although it can seem as though wicked people are the ones flourishing the way of wicked people will come to an end.**

כִּי-יִדַּעַ יְהוָה דָּרֶךְ צְדִיקִים וְדָרֶךְ רָשָׁעִים תֵּאַבֵּד:	6	Because YHWH cares for the way of righteous people, and the way of wicked people will come to an end.
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- The final verse begins with the word **because** (כִּי):
 - The word does not point back only to what was said in verse 5, as if YHWH's care for righteous people were the reason that the wicked people will not stand in judgment. Instead, the word 'because' introduces "the reason ... for what is said in [all of] verses 1-5."⁸⁸ So, for example, the reason why the righteous, and not the wicked people, are to be considered 'happy' (verse 1) is because of the two truths affirmed in verse 6.
 - When the word *because* is used to give the reasons for what happened in large amounts of text, "translations sometimes leave [it] untranslated because it does not entirely make sense on a grammatical level."⁸⁹ Therefore, some translations leave the word untranslated here.⁹⁰ However, most English translations use the word *for*.⁹¹ It may make sense in some languages to add a phrase like *How do we know all of this?* or *What's the reason for all of this?*
- Psalm 1:6 affirms two truths on which the argument of the whole psalm rests. The first truth affirmed in this verse is that **YHWH cares for the way of righteous people** (יִדַּעַ יְהוָה דָּרֶךְ צְדִיקִים).

⁸⁸ BHRG §40.29.2. Zenger titles this section appropriately as "Abschließende Begründung" ("final reason") (Zenger 1993, 48). See Ps 5:13 for a similar ending of a psalm.

⁸⁹ BHRG §40.29.2.

⁹⁰ CEV, GNT.

⁹¹ KJV, ESV, NIV, NLT, NASB, CSB.

- The verb **cares for** (יָדַעַ) literally means *knows*.⁹² English translations also render it as *watches over*,⁹³ *protects*,⁹⁴ *guards*,⁹⁵ and *cherishes*.⁹⁶ Each of these translations captures something of the meaning of the verb, which refers to YHWH's intimate and active involvement in the life of the righteous.⁹⁷ Other nuances include *guides* or *(lovingly) directs*.
 - The verb is in a form (*participle*) which indicates timelessness. So, YHWH cares not just in the past, present, or future, but at all times.
- The phrase **the way of righteous people** is a figure of speech that means *the lives, activities, behavior, and circumstances of righteous people*.
 - As in verse 1, the word **way** (or road) functions as an image that refers to a lifestyle.
 - The use of the word 'way' means that the Psalm concludes, as it began, with **the image of a journey** (see verse 1).
- The second truth affirmed in verse 6 is that **the way of wicked people will come to an end** (וְדֶרֶךְ רָשָׁעִים תֵּאבֵד).
 - This truth is a complete contrast with the first truth of the verse. So, translators could render the first word **and** as *but* (ESV, NASB, NIV, CSB, etc.), which is one of the functions of this word (וְ) in Hebrew.
 - The phrase **the way of wicked people** appears in the sentence in an unusual order in Hebrew.⁹⁸ The effect of this unusual order is that it raises the expectation for the listener that some contrasting statement is about to be made about the wicked people. In English, the contrast could be expressed as: "*But, as for the way of wicked people...*"⁹⁹
 - The word **wicked people** completes a special pattern of words in verses 5 and 6.¹⁰⁰ The purpose of this pattern is to draw attention to the middle term, which is the divine name YHWH. It looks like this:

A: **wicked people** (verse 5a)
 B: **righteous people** (verse 5b)
 C: **YHWH** (verse 6a)
 B: **righteous people** (verse 6a)
 A: **wicked people** (verse 6b)

Translators can also draw attention to this middle term 'YHWH' through word choice, grammatical structures, poetics, or performance.

⁹² KJV, RSV, ESV, NASB; see LXX γινώσκει, Jerome: *novit*.

⁹³ NIV, NLT, NEB, CSB.

⁹⁴ CEV.

⁹⁵ NET.

⁹⁶ NJV.

⁹⁷ SDBH: a "state in which deities are actively involved in circumstances related to the life of humans and care for their well-being."

⁹⁸ It is fronted within its clause.

⁹⁹ Lunn 2006, 200.

¹⁰⁰ This is called an ABCBA pattern, or chiasm.

- The final word of the psalm is a single verb we have rendered as **will come to an end** (תֵּאֲבֹד):
 - It refers to a "process by which an event comes to an end, usually under unfavorable circumstances."¹⁰¹ English translations render it *will perish*,¹⁰² *leads to destruction*,¹⁰³ *leads to ruin*,¹⁰⁴ or *is doomed*.¹⁰⁵
 - The future tense of the event is crucial to the message of the psalm; although it seems like wicked people flourish in the present, their way will come to an end.¹⁰⁶
 - This word 'will come to an end' is appropriate as a conclusion to the psalm, for two reasons:
 - Its meaning has a sense of finality.
 - It begins with the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet (ת). The first word of the psalm began with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet (א).¹⁰⁷ So, "the psalm is as complete as the alphabet - 'from A to Z,' one might say."¹⁰⁸

¹⁰¹ SDBH.

¹⁰² KJV, ESV, NASB.

¹⁰³ NIV, NLT.

¹⁰⁴ CSB, CEV.

¹⁰⁵ NEB, NJB.

¹⁰⁶ See Jeremiah 12:1; Malachi 3:15; Psalm 37.

¹⁰⁷ See Pss. 5, 150 and Job 14 for other instances of this phenomenon.

¹⁰⁸ Seow 2013, 289.

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