

PSALM 1

The purpose of the Law is to train God's Son about God's Kingdom.

We aren't told who wrote this Psalm, but we do know that David took the Law of God very seriously. Read Psalm 119 for proof. And since David literally created the worship litany for the Temple, we can assume at the very least that this Psalm was based on the King's directives.

David related to his God as his Father in Heaven. (Psalm 27:10; 68:5; 89:26; 103:13) He also knew that God considered the nation of Israel as his "Firstborn son." (Exodus 4:22) Therefore the Father/Son dynamic powers the faith of Israel. And in any good relationship between father and son, the father has a lot to teach his son and he wants his son to submit to his instruction willingly. The wellbeing of the estate is at stake. So the first item on the agenda is for the Son to learn about the Kingdom from his Father.

David had a lot of experience learning from God. He learned God's ways, his works, his nature and glory, he learned the profound wisdom of God, he depended on God over and over for protection from his enemies, he sat at God's feet in his formative years and prepared to sit on Israel's throne. It's doubtful that any other person in Israel had the kind of learning experience that David had. As a result, we are told several times in the history that "in everything David did, he prospered." So it's appropriate that David would now, from his position of authority over the Kingdom, lead the Israelites into the same training program that he had gone through.

The reason he urged Israel to learn about their God ought to be obvious: he needed everyone to cooperate with him as he set up the Kingdom around the House of God. If people didn't cooperate with the King and learn their roles, there would be serious problems and the Mission would stall. But if everyone did learn their part, it would mean the Kingdom of God on earth, with all the blessings that attend that reality.

So whoever gave David trouble about this (and unfortunately there would be many) could themselves expect trouble and punishment; the welfare of the people of God was at stake. The King will not tolerate wolves among the sheep.

This Psalm sets the agenda for the rest of the book of Psalms in that the concepts in the Law (and they are manifold and rich, as we will see shortly) are the foundation of Israel's life with God. So David and the Psalms continually focus on that special Inheritance described in the books of Moses.

Blessed – David is about to set up a Kingdom in which God himself would be present among his people. That necessarily sets the stage for extraordinary things to happen. The God of Israel will bring the power and wisdom and resources of Heaven to bear

on man's problems in a way that no other power on earth can match. There will be a lot of open doors between the Israelites and God's spiritual world.

The true heirs of Abraham are about to experience the riches of the Patriarch's

Inheritance: walking with God, forgiveness of sin, the righteousness of the eternal Son, the destruction of their enemies, the guidance of the Spirit, the Family gathering around the throne of God in peace and prosperity. And to them, this *will* be a rich blessing compared to a life without God.

But that doesn't mean that everyone will be on board with this Mission. There are too many, even among the People of God, who want nothing to do with a transformed life. They will tolerate an outward conforming to the Law, but not of the heart. They love their hidden sins, they guard their own glory and pride among men, they crave power and dominion over the weak – these kinds of people *don't* want God in their midst. They will even work behind the scenes to frustrate the plans of the King. Which means that there will always be two parties present: those who “have the appearance of godliness, but deny its power” (2 Timothy 3:5), and those who plead with God from the heart: “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!” (Luke 18:13) One will be shut out from the presence of God, and the other welcomed into the Family of Abraham. The second type will be truly blessed by this Kingdom that David is setting up.

The Law – This is not simply referring to the list of commandments – the do's and don'ts of the Mosaic Law. I think Christians are worried that David here is willingly submitting himself to what Paul warned us against in the book of Galatians – righteousness by observing the Law instead of righteousness by faith. But even a cursory reading of the rest of the Psalms will show that David had a faith that outshone us all; he understood perfectly that he himself was only a helpless sinner and that only

God's righteousness could save him. (Psalm 38)

Instead the Law (to David, since he was a Jew) was the Torah (תורה) – the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures. And that includes *everything* that described their special relationship to their God, not just the commandments:

Creation

The Covenant Promises

Deliverance

The Priest and the Temple

The Kingdom

Wisdom

The Prophet

Here is a richness that is unequalled by any other treasure on earth. It's a full description of God, his ways and works, his glory, his wisdom, his holiness and power. It's the story of their Inheritance by way of the Patriarchs. The Torah shows God's love for his “Firstborn son” – Israel; and the things he did to create Israel, protect them, and bring them into a “land flowing with milk and honey.” Everything that describes their God and their faith is laid out in the Law of Moses, as well as the kind of life that God expected of them if they hoped to please him.

And God promised the Israelites that if they submitted to him, were faithful to him, and obeyed his commands, he would richly bless them according to the very specific Promises given in the Torah. (Deuteronomy 28:1-14)

Meditate – It's one thing to have all the information laid out plainly in front of you in the Bible; but it's quite another thing to actually use that information in your life.

“Listen, my Son!” The Father is always instructing his Son, either the easy way or the hard way. The easy way was to read the Word of God, take it to heart, and do it. “The one who looks into the perfect Law, the Law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.” (James 1:25)

What David was telling his subjects was to start digging through those five books and learn it, and make it the very foundation of their lives. He himself was going to follow it to the letter as he pulled the nation together. In the past Israel rarely took its lessons seriously, and that’s why they had such a poor track record. David, however, fully intended to build the Nation on this rich and secure foundation that God had given them. His purpose was that anybody in the world, throughout history, could look at Israel and see the lessons of the Torah in their beliefs and actions; they were the People of God, Abraham’s heirs – and they would look like it. They would be trained well by their Father in Heaven. “If you were Abraham’s children, you would be doing the works Abraham did.” (John 8:39) But it requires more than the King’s efforts – everyone has to be involved in this Mission.

The key to success was *meditation* on the Torah. This is different from ordinary Bible reading. Not only must you learn the facts, but you must also put the facts together to see the flow of what’s going on, and why God did these things, and what was achieved in Israel’s history, and the spiritual interactions between Heaven and earth, and the problems in man’s character that constantly threaten the relationship between God and man, and why God’s resources and commands address each

situation in life perfectly. These are not kindergarten level lessons; they are the necessary training sessions to run the Kingdom of God on earth.

You could choose the hard way to learn these lessons (usually by ignoring them), but it will be painful. God will discipline his child through painful experiences in order to teach him, if that’s what it takes. Meditating on the Word is a much better way to go.

Fruitful – A superficial reading of God’s Word does *not* make you a fruitful believer! “Fruitful” is clearly explained in Jesus’ parable about the talents. (Matthew 25:14-30) God has given his people all the resources of Heaven to accomplish what *he* wants to see happen on earth. Heaven’s Treasures enrich God’s people; Heaven’s wisdom confounds the wise; Heaven’s power stops the works of the Enemy; Heaven’s light makes clear the way to Life. Anyone who thinks that the phrase “in all that he does, he prospers” is for secular gain is totally missing the point, and will be punished as was that “fool” in the parable who planned only for filling his barns.

David had a Mission: it was his job to build the Kingdom of God on earth in a way that would please his God. The one thing he wanted to see in his subjects, therefore, was cooperation – they must work with him in this Mission. From the least to the greatest, their Mission also was “Your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven.” (Matthew 6:10) The great and powerful had their role to play (1 Timothy 6:17-19) and the humble and poor had theirs. All of God’s people must work toward the same end.

And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of

cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward. (Matthew 10:42)

The end result would be a fulfillment of what God promised them in the Torah – the great inheritance first given to the Patriarchs. If modern Christians don't understand the critical importance of the truths taught in the books of Moses, it's only because they haven't meditated deeply on these truths, particularly how Jesus himself fulfilled them in his ministry. Usually they simply write the whole thing off as "legalism," or Israel's unique history that we don't have to identify with, which is a gross misunderstanding of Israel's faith. So they can't hope to be blessed as David and Israel were. Jesus, however, believed that the Torah was the way to salvation. (Luke 16:29)

Congregation – This was the assembly of the Israelites at the Temple. If you know anything about the requirements of the Law, only the Israelites (not Gentiles) were allowed to approach God at the Temple, and then only those who were ceremonially clean by following the laws of sacrifice and offering.

But there was more than that involved in this privilege. It was easy to go through the required rituals that the Law prescribed – no doubt many Israelites consoled themselves with their superficial worship by thinking that God would therefore bless them. But according to what David was teaching them in this Psalm, whoever meditates deeply on the lessons of the Torah, and in obedience uses the Treasures from Heaven to help the King build his Kingdom on earth, will be able to approach God in his House and see his glory. They will hear the words from

God's own mouth, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" (Matthew 25:21) Superficial worshipers may be physically present on the premises, but it would be a one-way conversation; they will get nothing from God. They wouldn't hear the same praise from God as the true worshipers hear, "who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh." (Philippians 3:3) God will become real to them, and his Spirit will be in them, and they will experience the fullness of the Inheritance of the Son; even in the act of worship, God singles out the good from the bad. (Luke 18:10-14)

Realize also that this judgment in Psalm 1 comes from the King himself. Someone other than ourselves has to judge whether we are part of God's Family. Jesus told another parable (Matthew 22:1-14) about the King who stopped a guest trying to get into the wedding banquet because he didn't have on the appropriate clothing, and he had him thrown "into the outer darkness" away from the King's House. So in the end, superficial worshipers will get nothing from God even as they stand in the Temple; and true worshipers who please God will find a Father full of love for his child, ready to enrich them with the Treasures of Heaven – which their faith will show them. One will walk away empty, the other blessed.

The Way – Again, someone could take this generically to mean that whatever "way" we go in this world – our lifestyle, our workplace, our pastimes – God will watch over us. But that ignores the Mission. Our goal is to *see God* (not the vain pursuits and pleasures of this world). And God has only one Way to life, and that's his Way. "I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life. No one

comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6) In other words, the LORD knows the Way that his people have to walk in this world in order to find him and experience eternal life: it’s the training of the Son, it’s the Kingdom set up on earth filled with Heaven’s Treasures and glory, it’s the Family of God gathered in God’s House, holy and righteous. If they don’t know this Way very well, God does; and he will take care to instruct them in his Way step by step, faithfully and with compassion and using discipline when necessary, to keep them in that Way. It’s all outlined in the Torah that they must meditate on and take to heart. God knows what is necessary, what is best for them, what they must achieve, and where it will take them.

And the wicked – well, we have come full circle. Those who hold God’s Word in contempt, who have no interest in or understanding of the great concepts of our faith as laid down in the Torah, will find that their lives are empty, without meaning or purpose. God himself will see to that. To live without God is to be at the mercy of the “father” that so many unbelieving Jews followed to their destruction (John 8): the “ruler of the kingdom of the air,” the great liar and deceiver, the one who is himself doomed to the fires of hell. “But as for these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slaughter them before me.” (Luke 19:27)

The Point – The Torah describes the fullness of a life-giving relationship with Israel’s God. It’s a mistake to equate the word “Law” in this Psalm to just the commandments of the Law. It’s true that we can’t keep the Law on our own efforts and be accounted righteous in God’s eyes, but then neither could the Israelites (as their dismal history

proved!). But the Law of Moses covers much more than that; in fact, it also covers what sinners must do when they *can’t* keep the righteous requirements of the Law and they need God’s forgiveness and grace. See Exodus 34:6-7 for an example. Everything is there in the Torah for sinners to become Family and find God.

But where does that put the rest of the Bible? Actually from the book of Joshua through the end of the Prophets, we have the story of Israel learning those fundamental concepts of the Torah, trying and failing and trying again to take them seriously. That’s basically what the rest of the Old Testament is about – Israel living with God, as Son to the Father.

And the New Testament tells us about the Son of God coming to earth to bring in a vast number of (not just Jews, but) Gentiles into the family of Abraham, to experience that same richness that was promised to the Jews. Jesus was the great Heir of Abraham, and what he received from his Father he now passes on to the rest of us who, by faith, prove ourselves to be Abraham’s heirs also. So in a way, the word “Law” can be expanded to include the entire Bible; we are obligated to study all of it. But the foundation stone for the entire Book is the Torah: the Old Testament spelled it out in Israel’s history, and Jesus fulfilled it for eternity.

This means that the King – Jesus Christ – insists that we learn his Law, meditate deeply on the Torah, master and start using the Books of Moses and its spiritual principles,² so that we will

² If any Christian thinks that there’s nothing in the Books of Moses for their faith, see the titles in the Appendix for some helpful materials. As Paul tells us, God did nothing less than preach

cooperate with the King as he builds his Kingdom on earth. Jesus requires the same cooperation from Christians as did King David from the Israelites. It's time for us to learn about Israel's God – the God of Jacob – if we want the same blessing he gave to our forefather Abraham.

the Gospel of Christ to Abraham and the Patriarchs as an inheritance for the Family of God. (Galatians 3:8)