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*PSALM 1A–B (1:1–2:12 as combined and a chiasm):  
What YHWH Knows about People’s Paths and Plans  
that will Perish*

**Abstract:**

This article seeks to explore whether a division really exists between Psalm 1 and Psalm 2. The author argues that the presence of a *chiasm* which extends throughout the two psalms gives potential further evidence for the argument that the two psalms were once part of one continuous literary creation. The themes involve the laws of YHWH and the consequences of breaking these laws both for individuals and for nations.

**Keywords:** Psalm 1, Psalm 2, law, consequences, chiasm

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Often Psalm 1 or Psalms 1 and 2 are treated as a fitting editorial introduction to the OT Psalter.<sup>1</sup> Many see this as interesting in light of the frequent interpretation of Psalm 1 as sapiential and Psalm 2 as royal (even Messianic to some).<sup>2</sup> Naturally, such editorial and theological approaches leave behind the reality that each psalm was originally composed independently and likely with no knowledge of the other. We do not know when either was written or why, and we have no suggestive superscriptions.<sup>3</sup> While it is an intriguing idea, in Psalter reception, for Psalms 1–2 to provide an ideal preface, this conclusion has only human warrant. Regardless, from a practical perspective, the wise man of Psalm 1 together with the conquering king of Psalm 2 form collectively a fitting entrance into the OT Book of Psalms, characterized mainly by poems of praise and lament.<sup>4</sup> “Book” is also problematic, since it conveys the notion of a written work with chapters composed consecutively by someone with knowledge of the preceding texts. The various psalms in the Psalter mostly grew out of different (and mostly unknown) times and circumstances, and the current order (1–150, with five separate collections, each ordered by unknown reasons) is mysterious.<sup>5</sup> Psalms 1–2 represent(s) a conscious creation of a seeming introduction by some unknown editor (or editors) for unknown reasons (objectively indicated by the presence of an *inclusio* using ירשא in 1:1a and 2:12c). In light of ancient and recent reflections on how these two psalms have common themes and were originally one psalm (Psalm 1A and 1B),<sup>6</sup> I will try to demonstrate a chiasmic structure, which in broad strokes is (cf. Table A below):

A	Proclamation of favor	1:1a	
B	Lawful Rules	1:1b–3	
C	Lawless Nature/Consequences	1:4–5	
D	Transitional Theme	1:6a	fate of the law keepers
		1:6b	fate of the law breakers
C'	Lawless Nations/Consequences	2:1–3	
B'	Lawful Rule	2:4–12b	
A'	Proclamation of favor	2:12c	

If such a structure was intended by the author, as divinely guided, it would be “inspired” and authoritative, unlike later (rabbinic or Christian) editorial activity.<sup>7</sup>

### A, A' **Proclamation of Favor (1:1a; 2:12c)**

אשרי should not be translated “happy” since that word, as currently used in English, does not provide an accurate counterpart to what the Hebrew word meant when Psalm 1 was composed.<sup>8</sup> Most English readers in the West will derive connotations from “happy” that will detract from understanding this text contextually. ESV uses “blessed” but that is a word whose current understanding is vague and debated, and whose current (especially popular) usage again is misleading (per its OT sense). Such a person in OT terms is “favored” by God or fortunate. Here the outcome is not psychological or spiritual, as seen in the verses that follow. This אשרי standing is a result of avoiding advice that is contrary to YHWH’s laws (cf. vv. 1b–2). The result is not feelings but productivity. They are compared to well-watered trees that produce the right fruit at the right time (v. 3).<sup>9</sup> The אשרי person is favored by God with effectiveness. His emotions have nothing to do with it.

The text literally speaks of “the man [הַאִישׁ]” as אֲשֶׁר. Egalitarian concerns tempt us to translate like the NRSV: “those who do not follow.” The masculine singular in Hebrew can be used as a collective, just as we speak in English of “the poor” as a group, although grammatically singular. But in terms of respecting the historical and cultural sense of this verse, we might expect a sage writing a psalm to have only his male disciples in mind. He may specifically have been thinking of young men tempted by their unrighteous peers. In 2:12b, the psalmist ends (and recaptures 1:1a) by proclaiming that “favored [אֲשֶׁרִי]” is everyone [כָּל]; collective singular] taking refuge (participle) in him,” him being the king mentioned previously in Psalm 2. In particular and specifically, the psalmist is addressing those kings/leaders who have been in rebellion against YHWH’s chosen or anointed king (2:1–3). What they will gain by submission to this king is, again, not something emotional or psychological, but is the favored or fortunate status of safety from his wrath (2:11–12b). To say that these texts are promoting “happiness” as we use that term today (as the outcome for the wise decisions encouraged in these psalms) is at odds with the setting of these psalms and the author’s (or authors’) contextual clues. Psalm 1A-B begins and ends with the proclamation that success and safety are favored conditions that result from following YHWH’s laws and the king who administers his laws.

**B, B' Lawfulness (1:1b–3; 2:4–12b)**

Psalm 1:1b–3 mirrors 2:4–12b. In Psalm 1:1, a person is fortunate, or positioned favorably for success, who chooses to avoid the influence of lawless people.<sup>10</sup> “Blessed is the man” to some is sexist, and it could be used that way, and does sound that way to a modern ear. Alternatively, however, if we want to hear a text in its original setting, and understand what the ancient speaker intended (as much as is possible), it stands to reason that such a sage would have had in mind the males whom he tutored. That they lived in an age that restricted and objectified women in ways we today find problematic, is a reality of this text’s context; and to translate it to more accurately reflect its setting and sense does not require an interpretation and application that understands the words to be prescriptive for all future situations. That the speaker was colored by his world culturally is a “given” for any text, but the reader can extract the intended ethical principle without drawing a universal and absolute law about women’s or men’s rights based on a culturally conditioned and idiomatic use of the gender of a Classical Hebrew noun. Rather than being concerned about advice from “sinners,”<sup>11</sup> “his” enjoyment comes from YHWH’s rules, on which he reflects every day (1:2). The translation of *הִתְחַלְּטֵה* in 1:2b as “meditate” is problematic because English readers are tempted to read anachronistic current usage into the meaning.<sup>12</sup> Also one wonders how this can be said of all law-abiding Jews at that time. Only the religious elite had access to any copies of Mosaic law, so the picture is inaccurate that the average reader gets of someone sitting down with a “Bible” and cup of coffee to “meditate” on these legal texts. And it should be obvious that if “day and night” is taken as a merism for “all the time” then no one could do that apart from perhaps a priest in training.<sup>13</sup> More likely is that the idiom indicates “daily” or once in the morning and once in the evening. Yet if we think of the ancient Jews who were familiar with and dedicated to YHWH’s laws, the picture we get should be of Jews who regularly and daily reflect on their religious rules as they go about their business. (1:2). Such reflection leads to application that produces the right (righteous) responses to life’s challenges, which in turn leads to a productive (successful) existence, materially and physically.<sup>14</sup> Picture a tree with its roots near a stream (1:3a). Such a tree is always nourished so is always fruitful (1:3b). Such a person will be productive (1:3c).<sup>15</sup> Why did some editor decide to place this wise advice at the start of the Psalter? To know for sure, we will have to ask him,

but perhaps he thought of the Psalms as presenting an overall theme about the contrast between those who do right or wrong.

Psalm 2 (1B?) continues this theme by highlighting the defeat that awaits those who oppose YHWH's rule through his king, who is to uphold his decrees. 2:6 clarifies that this king and son is (in the poet's mind) a specific Israelite monarch (cf. comments below on vv. 7–9) since it presents YHWH as proclaiming "I have [just] installed my [chosen/anointed] king on the holy/distinct Mount Zion [in Jerusalem]."16 2:4-12b and 1:1-3 both deal with right behavior. In the former, rebellious rulers are cautioned against unwise choices (2:10), specifically against fearlessly refusing to serve YHWH (2:11) by withholding allegiance to his "son" (i.e. his anointed or chosen ruler 2:12a). Otherwise they risk his wrath, easily stirred up, leading to war and their defeat (2:12b). YHWH had decreed this one as king over Israel, making him (in typical ANE thought) his "son" (2:7), who has the right to make requests of Father God, who will (as promised to the Hebrew patriarchs) give him possession over the nations (Gentiles; *goy*) throughout all the land (not "earth" as NIV) in Canaan (2:8).17 He will be victorious in battle: he will break them into pieces (2:9).18 This bi-colon should be marked as follows:

A	B	C	
you-will-break-them	with-a-rod-made-of	iron	//
D	E	A'	
like-pots-made-by	a-potter	you-will-shatter-them.	

A possible alternative is:

A	B	C	
you-will-break-them	with-a-rod-made-of	iron	//
B'	C'	A'	
with-a-weapon-made-by	a-craftsman	you-will-shatter-them.	19

### C, C' Lawlessness (1:4–6, 2:1–3)

Psalm 1:4–6 mirrors 2:1–3. Here the law breaker is contrasted with the previous law keeper ("righteous" in terms of doing what is right or lawful versus "wicked" in terms of doing what is wrong or unlawful; cf. n 6 above). In so-called Psalm 1, the "wicked" (lawbreakers) are not preoccupied with YHWH's directives, so unlike stable and productive well-watered trees, they are like unanchored pieces of tree bark, easily blown by

the wind in any direction (1:4). Consequently, they are unable to stand their ground when challenged (1:5). This is a curious verse. Exactly why and how are these law breakers among an assembly of law keepers for judgment?<sup>20</sup> If we look at this in light of its possible parallel in Psalm 2 (vv. 1–3), then we have those rebelling against YHWH’s rule (through his king in Jerusalem) being addressed by YHWH as a wrathful and furious Judge. We see these wicked rebels (cf. 1:4) taking counsel together towards rebellion (cf. the wicked/lawless counsel that wise people reject in 1:1). Those coalitions of individuals (1:1) or institutions (2:10) who reject YHWH’s rules (1:4) or rule (2:1–3), are subject to prosecution by those in power and empowered by allegiance to YHWH’s rules and established rulers (1:5; 2:1–3; cf. 2:4–6).<sup>21</sup>

### D Transitional Climax (1:6; the fate of law-keepers/-breakers)

The climax or fulcrum of this chiasm comes in 1:6, where the fate of those who do what is right or just is juxtaposed with those who do what is wrong or unjust. Again, the righteous/wicked terminology is to be read in light of its ancient wisdom genre, and not our current theology related to imputed righteousness or sinners as unbelievers. In the social context of this psalm (Ps 1), the audience is Israelites, all of whom belong to the chosen nation and recognize YHWH, but (as today) some follow good and others bad advice. 1:6 presents what traditionally was labeled antithetical parallelism. The contrasting of the “righteous” with the “wicked” is a regularly recurring theme in OT wisdom literature on both the larger book and periscope level as well as with various bi-cola. The bi-colon of Psalm 1:6 is as follows schematically (literal English rendering of the MT):

A	B	C
Because--He-knows	YHWH	(the)-way-of
D	C'	D'
righteous-ones //	But-the-way-of	wicked-ones
E/A?		
she/it-will-perish.		

In the Hebrew text the metrics (not isolating *maqeph*) involve 4:3 words and 10:8 syllables (A-B-C-D // C-D'-E/A). The value of the verb ending the second line is questioned as either E or A' because it provides the parallel action related to the wicked (in juxtaposition with the righteous in the preceding line) but unlike the first line, the verb of the second line is about

what happens to “the way” whereas in the first the action is what YHWH does. At first blush this is a curious text. In what way does YHWH “know” the ways of the righteous? Why is a participle used? What are the “ways” of the righteous? What kind of syntax explains “ways of” here, in each line? How does the wicked “way” perish? Is “perish” the best rendering of this verb? What is the syntax of the *yiqtol* verb? Why does this verse begin with “because”?

If we apply the possibility of reverse parallelism<sup>22</sup> to this bicolon, we can perceive an uncommon perspective about what this verse is postulating:

A	B	C	D
“For”--He-knows	YHWH	(the)-way-of	righteous-ones
[E]	//	C’	D’
[not-will-perish]		But -(the)-way-of	wicked-ones
[A	B]	E	
[He-knows	YHWH]	will-perish/perishes.	

Although the verb E in the second line is not negated, the antithetical nature of the parallelism would imply a negation in the first line. Traditional interpretation of this verse has wrestled with the nuance of “knowing” and how that is related to what YHWH does with the wicked in the future in the second line, requiring the addition of words not in the Hebrew text. This in itself is not incorrect (since translation often requires additional words in the receptor language to convey what was intended in the source text), it just exemplifies the interpretive/translational challenge. The NIV has, “For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.” The implication for the reader is that “knows” equals “watch over” (righteous people), and “perish” suggests God does not pay close attention to “wicked” people. Such a rendering raises theological questions.<sup>23</sup> Part of the problem is the juxtaposition of righteous/wicked since Christian readers bring their theology and theological baggage about “all are sinners” and “none is righteous” to the table, and then for the sake of harmonization of scripture (and the improper commitment to cross references) have to make “righteous” mean “justified ones” or “those declared righteous,” and then the “wicked” are the unbelievers. The whole matter is much more straightforward if we read the text in its immediate

literary and OT/ANE-wisdom contexts. Most likely all the players here are Hebrews and part of YHWH's covenant community; and they are fallible humans.<sup>24</sup>

The גוֹיִם “nations” of Psalm 2 do not have to be taken as we use “nation” today, but can just refer to other Hebrew and/or Canaanite tribes. The parallel term for גוֹיִם in 2:1a is “peoples” (לְאֻמִּים) in 2:1b.<sup>25</sup> “Nation” plants an idea in the mind of modern readers that may be foreign to what the author intended. The “kings of the אֲרָץ” in 2:2 is usually rendered “kings of the earth” but אֲרָץ is basically and usually “land,” and מֶלֶךְ “king” in the OT setting is not always a king as we use the term. In Joshua and Judges and before Hebrew monarchy the term is used for leaders of towns or tribes or territories, so does not have to be more than a “leader” in many cases (so the rendering “king” can be misleading). The parallel term in 2:2b is רוֹדְדִים “rulers.” Translators often fail to consider enough the impact of what idea is planted in a reader’s mind when a certain gloss is chosen. The original proposition could have been that wise (law abiding) and unwise (law breaking) Hebrews existed and the latter needed to be reminded that the consequence of their behavior is a fruitless life and likely an early death (Ps 1); and that rebel rulers against YHWH’s anointed king in Jerusalem risk his anger and their annihilation (Ps 2). The occasion of Psalm 2 could be the time when Absalom revolted or when David had to fight other enemy tribes within or without Israel.<sup>26</sup> During such times many “foolish” people would have listened to and been persuaded by bad advice. In OT wisdom, a common theme and contrast is between the wise and the foolish, where the “fool” is not mentally but morally deficient. When people did what was right they were wise and righteous, and when they did wrong they were foolish and wicked. The “perishing” of Psalm 1:6b has to be understood in light of the previous warnings in verses 4–5, and as the opposite of how law keepers (right living people; “righteous”) are blessed in verses 1–3. In the OT, spirituality is a relationship with God but related to (Mosaic) rules; and in the NT, Christianity is a relationship (as many underline frequently) but not apart from obedience to Christ.

### Summary/Conclusion

The fulcrum, center-point, or climax of a chiasmic Psalm 1A–B (= traditional Psalms 1–2) is Psalm 1:6. It provides a hinge between the two sections of a poem about (1) how people who rebel against YHWH’s rules are subject to godly judgment and “perishing” (1:6 ;דבא) and (2) how



coalitions of people who rebel against YHWH's rule are doomed to God's judgment and "perishing" (2:12; דבא). An overall contrast is made between those who either own or oppose YHWH's governance and guidance (the rule of divine law). The rebels are not atheists or unbelievers or faithless or non-religious types. First (Psalm 1A = 1), individually, they are Israelites that belong to YHWH's covenant but choose to behave foolishly (immorally or unethically) when tempted by peer pressure, although the advice is contrary to godly rules or regulations and may be risky or ruinous. (1:1b-c). They are not pleased or preoccupied with YHWH's precepts (as is the one who does what is right or just; 1:2, 1:5b-6a). They are, therefore, unstable and subject to dismissal from participation in gatherings of law keepers for official business (1:4-5). YHWH "knows" (makes known?) that right behavior is productive, but wrong behavior is unproductive (1:6; cp. vv. 3, 4-5). Second (Psalm 1B = 2), collectively, they are tribal or territorial groups within Israel that may or may not be connected to YHWH's covenant but choose to rebel against YHWH's rule through his appointed/anointed Israelite/Hebrew ruler/king, (2:1-3, 6-9) which "nation" is exercising sovereignty over Canaan in line with its identity as YHWH's legitimate light and landlord. The heavenly King views such insolence as laughable and worthy of rage, so reminds these opponents that he installed Zion's king and warns them to fear and serve YHWH only, or he will dispense his anger and military judgment through his son and king (2:6, 10-12b). Those who consent to the K/king's commands and covenant, and seek his cover, will be favored/"blessed" (1:1a; 2:12c). A chiasmic unity of Psalms 1-2 is observable with the structure A-B-C-D-C'-B'-A' (1:1a)-(1:1b-3)-(1:4-5)-(1:6)-(2:1-6)-(2:7-12b)-(2:12c). Those who "mock [יִצְחָקוּ] (*l-y-tz*) God's guidance (1:1c) will be "mocked [יִצְחָקוּ] (*l-g*) by God (2:4b). The climax (1:6) pivots on those who are careful or careless about obedience to divine *tôrah*/law or kingship, which two types of people are featured in both psalms as foolish and futile. Neither psalm has a superscription (as does Psalm 3, perhaps the initial psalm of the body of the Psalter proper, in the current canonical arrangement); so as a supposed introduction to the Psalms, its parallel bookend and conclusion (Psalms 145-150), emphasize the praiseworthiness of YHWH (the Law Giver).<sup>27</sup> A good God gives good governance. Per Westermann, the OT Psalter then revolves around praise and lament because the latter is often created by lawlessness while the former results when the painful consequences and ruin from rebellion are forgiven or fixed, which encourages renewed loyalty to God and godly guidelines.

However interpreted, YHWH “keeps knowing [יִדְעַת]” human “ways” (beliefs and behaviors; 1:6). Those who accept what is right and YHWH’s rule (1:2 // 2:7, 10) will experience God’s favor/“blessing” (fruitfulness; 1:1a, 1:3 // 2:8–9, 12c), but those who reject what is right and the divine King’s rule (1:4 // 2:1–3) will experience God’s discipline (futility; 1:5 // 2:4–6, 11–12b). The data presented so far significantly increase the likelihood that so-called Psalms 1 and 2 were composed by the same poet/psalmist/author, who remains anonymous, and that they may have been originally combined and chiasmic.

### End notes

<sup>1</sup> Dahood called Psalm 1 a “*précis* of the Book of Psalms.” Cf. Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms 1: 1–50*, Anchor Bible 16, gen. eds. Albright and Freedman (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 1. Cf. e.g. *inter alia* William H. Brownlee, “Psalms 1–2 as a Coronation Liturgy,” *Biblica* 52:3 (1971), 321–22; Roland E. Murphy, “Reflections on Contextual Interpretation of the Psalms,” in *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter*, ed. J. Clinton McCann, JSOT (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 23; John Goldingay, *Psalms 1–42*, Vol. 1: Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms, ed. Tremper Longman III (Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, 2006), 23; A. F. Kirkpatrick, 1902, *The Book of Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982 paperback ed.), 1; and cf. nn. 4, 9 below.

<sup>2</sup> Kidner thought it likely Psalm 1 was composed as an introduction but conceded at least it stands as a “doorkeeper, confronting those who would be the ‘congregation of the righteous’ (5)”<sup>2</sup>; cf. Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1–72*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, ed. D. J. Wiseman (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973), 47. Some claim 60% of this psalm is used directly or indirectly in the NT (cf. Witness Lee, “Christ and the Church Revealed and Typified in the Psalms” (<https://www.ministrysamples.org/excerpts/NEW-TESTAMENT-QUOTATIONS-OF-PSALM.HTML>). Living Stream Ministry. Accessed 07 Aug 2019. While a messianic application is found in the NT (cf. Acts 2:36; 4:25–28; 13:33; Heb 1:5) an exegetical approach would find no conscious prediction about Jesus as Messiah in this psalm. None of the OT passages claimed as “Messianic” employs the Hebrew word “anointed one” (מְשִׁיחַ). The teachings about a coming Messiah as used by the apostles in the NT arose in Judaism during the 2<sup>nd</sup>-Temple period. Jesus and his followers built on this and found they could connect Jesus typologically and spiritually to many OT passages. It did not matter that the OT text did not intentionally speak about the one we call Jesus the Christ since such a spiritual use of the OT was current and accepted in Judaism of the first century. This hermeneutic as employed by the first Christians was consistent with how the Jews handled their scripture. Cf. Richard N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1999). Ironically, the only OT use of “anointed” (מְשִׁיחַ) that has a chance of

being applied directly and prophetically to Jesus is Psalm 2 (but as hinted at already, the meaning of the anointed son and king contextually and historically and exegetically has to be an ancient Jewish king, although he can be seen to typify Jesus in retrospect but not interpreted as Jesus in prospect. The text is framed in past-tense language, and no one in the original audience would have come away thinking a future “messiah” like Jesus was being portrayed. After all, “messiah” is not a translation but a transliteration of Hebrew *māšî’ah* (the meaning being “anointed”; as was done with all OT kings).

<sup>3</sup> Psalm 2, however, is mentioned in Acts 4:25 and ascribed to David; and Acts 13:33 calls it the second psalm, but an alternative Greek text (D) calls it the first psalm (cf. a Latin ms. known to Bede and cf. Origen, according to whom the Jews often combined 1 and 2; cf. *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, ed. Nicoll [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976 rpt.], II:296). This is often viewed as evidence that the first two psalms were originally connected and so-called “Psalm 2” (having no superscription) was a continuation of Psalm 1. Cf. Kidner, *Psalms 1–72*, 49–50. That people in prayer, rejoicing over the release of Peter and John from prison, are cited as expressing their understanding that David wrote Psalm 2 (Acts 4:25) is not actually a proof that David was the author. Such a text is accurate in that it factually reports what these people believed, which reflects their traditions of the time. This is not an apostolic pronouncement but what believers said in prayer. It does not have to be read as a doctrine or prescription (which is not the function of every biblical text, especially in isolation from the larger context). This verse describes what was said. Those saying it reveal what they truly believed, but that is not the same as an authoritative declaration, of which not every verse is capable.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, transl. Keith R. Crim and Richard N. Soulen (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1981). But for an opposing view see David Wilgren, “Why Psalms 1–2 Are Not to Be Considered a Preface to the “Book” of Psalms,” *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 130:3 (Sep 2018): 384. <https://search.proquest.com/religion/docview/2122774445/3433B2DB97344D0DPQ/11?accountid=31623#center>. Accessed 13 Aug 2019. Cf. also Samuel Emadi, review of Robert L. Cole, *Psalms 1–2: Gateway to the Psalter*, Hebrew Bible Monographs 37 (Sheffield: Phoenix, 2013); in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 57:2, (Jun 2014): 421–423. <https://search.proquest.com/religion/docview/1545898952/3433B2DB97344D0DPQ/13?accountid=31623>. Accessed 13 Aug 2019. The canonical approach takes Psalms 1–2 and 150 as hermeneutical keys to how the editors who arranged the psalms understood the collection’s purpose; cf. John C. Endres, “Psalms and Spirituality in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,” *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 56:2 (Apr 2002): 143–54, n.p. citing J. L. Crenshaw, *The Psalms: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), esp. 55–95. <https://search.proquest.com/religion/docview/202700711/3433B2DB97344D0DPQ/166?accountid=31623>. Accessed 13 Aug 2019. In an article Gillingham writes that “Furthermore, as the psalter was being shaped into its present form, Psalms 1–2, forming an introduction to the psalter, with the twin emphases on the Law and the Messiah, would also have been interpreted together with the same future-

oriented theocratic content, similar to the tone of other parts of the Psalter, of which Psalms 72 and 73 are a good example." Susan Gillingham, "From Liturgy to Prophecy: The Use of Psalmody in Second Temple Judaism," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 64:3 (Jul 2002): 478; citing P. D. Miller, "The Beginning of the Psalter," in McCaan, ed., *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter*, 83–92. <https://search.proquest.com/religion/docview/220239918/fulltextPDF/90D309EB97344CA1PQ/37?accountid=31623>. Accessed 13 Aug 2019.

<sup>5</sup> Books I–V are sometimes popularly and speculatively related, respectively, to the five books of Moses (the Pentateuch): I (Pss 1–41; Genesis); II (42–72; Exodus); III (73–89; Leviticus); IV (90–106; Numbers); and V (107–150; Deuteronomy). Psalm 72 ends (v. 20) with an editorial insertion: "Thus concludes the prayers of David, son of Jesse." Others see a respective connection to the feasts Passover, Pentecost, Trumpets, Tabernacles, Purim; or the *Megilloth* scroll: Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther. [https://www.academia.edu/30193711/THE\\_STRUCTURE\\_OF\\_THE\\_FIVE\\_BOOKS\\_OF\\_PSAKMS](https://www.academia.edu/30193711/THE_STRUCTURE_OF_THE_FIVE_BOOKS_OF_PSAKMS). Accessed 12 Aug 2019.

<sup>6</sup> Brownlee considered Psalms 1–2 collectively as a coronation liturgy. Cf. Brownlee, "Psalms 1–2 as a Coronation Liturgy," 321–36. He refers to the ancient rabbinic tradition of Psalms 1–2 as a single psalm, also attested to by 4Q Florilegium (321 and 321 n. 2). Citing Brownlee, Botha refers to the union of Psalms 1–2 in many Hebrew manuscripts and the support among Church Fathers of the Talmudic tradition of uniting them. Cf. Phil J. Botha, "The ideological interface between Psalm 1 and Psalm 2," <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/0343/ea02ae5583e99f887eee2d349461dc35708a.pdf>. Accessed 12 Aug 2019. In a review of Gillingham's book, Gregory observes that before the temple was destroyed the first time these two psalms were bound by a temple theme but afterwards by a messianic or Torah theme. They continued to be interconnected in illuminated Bibles but were disconnected in liturgies. Modern studies emphasize their literary or theological connections, especially as an introduction to the OT Psalter. In the Qumran community these psalms symbolized the righteous and wicked factions within Judaism. Christians used them doctrinally for the two natures of Christ or apologetically as a prophecy about Jesus as the Messiah. Cf. Bradley C. Gregory, review of Susan Gillingham, *A Journey of Two Psalms: The Reception of Psalms 1 & 2 in Jewish & Christian Tradition* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Bradley, "The Value of Reception History for Theological Interpretation: Some Reflections on Susan Gillingham's *A Journey of Two Psalms*," *Cithara* 55:1 (Nov 2015): 41–46, 64. <https://search.proquest.com/religion/docview/1750209965/3433B2DB97344D0DPQ/8?accountid=31623>. Accessed 13 Aug 2019. Cf. also Jerome F. D. Creach, "Like a Tree Planted by the Temple Stream: The Portrait of the Righteous in Psalm 1:3," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 61:1 (Jan 1999): 34–46.

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<sup>7</sup> As early as Lowth (1778) inversion of thought in OT poetry was observed ([https://www.jstor.org/stable/529193?seq=1#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/529193?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents); Nils W. Lund, *Chiasmus in the Psalms*, 281, citing Bishop Robert Lowth, *Isaiah: A New Translation* [London, 1778], xiv). Psalms 1 and 2

have been treated as chiasms; e.g. cf. <http://doug4.blogspot.com/2016/11/chiastic-structure-of-psalm-1.html>; Robert L. Alden, "Chiastic Psalms: A Study in the Mechanics of Semitic Poetry in Psalms 1–50," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 17:1 (p. 14; n.d. [https://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/17/17-1/17-1-pp011-028\\_JETS.pdf](https://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/17/17-1/17-1-pp011-028_JETS.pdf)); "Psalm 1 and Poetic Forms" (<https://blnotjustasandwich.com/2012/05/20/psalm-1-and-poetic-forms/>); Biblical Chiasm Exchange, <https://www.chiasmusxchange.com/category/c-job-sos/psalms/>. But no attempt to explain Psalms 1–2 as a unity and chiastic was discovered.

<sup>8</sup> Still Kraus entitles this psalm "The Truly Happy Person" (at least that is how the translator rendered the original German text; cf. Hand-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, transl. Hilton C. Oswald, A Continental Commentary [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993], 112). Yet later he approves of Buber's rendering "Oh, how fortunate in the man"; cf. Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 115, citing M. Buber, *Recht und Unrecht*, 65/66. Cf. also Goldingay's translation "the good fortune of the person"; John Goldingay, *Psalms 1–41*, vol. 1, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Psalms (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 79. LXX used *makarios* which Louw and Nida relate to "happiness" in terms of favorable circumstances. Cf. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, ed. Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), 25.119. Electronic text hypertexted and prepared by Oak Tree Software, Inc. Version 4.2. Even HALOT speaks of "happiness" but current translators still must be cautioned that this term is likely misleading for modern readers per the Hebrew setting and use of this Hebrew word in the ANE. Cf. *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, ed. Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, translated and edited under the supervision of M.E.J. Richardson (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2000), 100. Electronic text hypertexted and prepared by Oak Tree Software, Inc. Version 3.5. Of course, as with most words "happy" in English has a number of different uses; but the primary or most initial connotation is what has to be considered sufficiently by translators before, especially, a modern word is used as a gloss for an ancient one. Currently, "happy" in American English elicits mainly notions of cheerfulness, delight, gleefulness, being carefree or euphoric or lighthearted or exhilarated, none of which probably is what the author of Psalm 1 intended. Cf. *Oxford Dictionary of English* and *Oxford Thesaurus of English* (Dictionary version 2.2.2 [203.1] Apple Inc., 2005-17). Notwithstanding Gillingham's assertion of "great happiness" for אושרי and observation that Psalm 2 is independent based on the fact it begins with a word starting with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet and ends with a word starting with the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet (cf. Susan Gillingham, "An Introduction to Reception History with Particular Reference to Psalm 1," *Revue des Sciences Religieuses* 85:4 [2011]: n.p., n. 6); <https://journals.openedition.org/rsr/1803>. Accessed 13 Aug 2019. The self-contained nature of Psalm 2 (as well as Psalm 1) can also be consistent with so-called Psalm 2 being Part II and a separate chiasm itself (as may be Psalm 1 as Part I) following the overall chiastic fulcrum in 1:6. Alden wrote in 1974 about the "chiastic structure of the poem" [Ps 1]; cf. Robert Alden, *Psalms: Songs of Devotion*, vol. 1: Psalms 1–50 (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), 7. Alden also presents an ABBA and ABBA schematic for Psalm 2 (p. 10).

<sup>9</sup> Dahood and others argue for “transplanted” rather than a “planted” tree. Cf. Dahood, *Psalms I: 1–50*, 3.

<sup>10</sup> Dahood argues for “assembly” instead of “way [of sinners]” in 1:1b. This fits with verse 5. Cf. Dahood, *Psalms I: 1–50*, 2. Kraus favors the translation of *לְהִלְכוּ אַחֲרֵי* in 1:1 as “to follow the advice [of]”; cf. Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 113, n. 1a.

<sup>11</sup> A Christian familiar with NT theology might find this wording strange, seemingly at odds with the NT. If everyone is a “sinner” (Rom 3:23; 1 John 1:10), then why does the psalm juxtapose this “man/human” and those who are wicked, sinful, and mocking? (Ps 1:1). If none is righteous (Rom 3:10; cf. Ps 14:1–3; 53:1–3), why was Noah saved from the Flood specifically due to his “righteousness”? (Gen 6:9, 22). In the OT there is the perspective of a distinction between those who (are not perfect) yet are blameless and who earnestly seek to obey God’s laws and please Him, as opposed to “sinners” who care little or nothing about strict adherence to religious or even many ethical regulations, and who also follow other gods. Still in the OT good behavior earns God’s favor, which in NT terms could be seen as in conflict with forgiveness based on grace through faith and not for works or good deeds, so no one can boast in a self-righteous manner. The difference, however, is that the OT is focused on punishments and rewards in earthly life resulting from decisions made on earth, while many NT passages focus on eternal life and how it cannot be merited by human effort. Kirkpatrick (*The Book of Psalms*, 2) speaks about the intensive form of the word indicating habitual action but the word in the MT (BHS) is a noun (*תַּעֲרָיִם*), which also like a *piel* verbal form doubles the middle letter of the root, so he must have mistaken it as a verb/participle. If the MT vocalization is ignored this could be postulated as original, but “the wicked ones” and “the mockers” are also nouns. The habitual idea is, however, relevant because these “sinners” are juxtaposed to those “righteous ones” who follow God’s laws but not perfectly or as sinless people.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. W. Creighton Marlowe, “Meditation in the Psalms,” *Midwestern Journal of Theology* 6:1 (2007): 3–18.

<sup>13</sup> While the English idiom “light and dark” (or “day and night”) could be used for “good and bad [times],” Classical Hebrew or related Semitic manuscripts (in whole or part; biblical or extra-biblical; or inscriptions dating to OT times) have no evidence of this usage. Dahood translates *יְהִי* in 1:2 as “recites,” cf. Dahood, *Psalms I: 1–50*, 1, 3. Kraus supports the meaning “all the time” or “constantly”; cf. Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 117.

<sup>14</sup> This is not the guarantee of health and wealth but the typical OT wisdom perspective that does not make promises but reminds the audience about reliable principles. The exception proves the rule. That a lawbreaker “gets away with murder” at times would not cause a wise person to conclude that “crime pays.” Normally crime is punished and the odds of not getting caught are so low that only a fool or completely desperate person chooses to be criminal. Wise (lawful) behavior greatly enhances the chances of a more prosperous and productive and prolonged life. While great wealth

and many years are not guaranteed, the wise people still choose to live in a manner that honors God's laws and increases their odds of success.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. the Egyptian Amen-em-ope's earlier comparison of the truly silent man to a tree in a garden, which doubles its yield; also cf. Jeremiah 11:19; 17:7-8; Ezekiel 17:5ff., and Psalm 92:13-15. Cf. Kraus, *Psalms 1-59*, 118, citing Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, 421.

<sup>16</sup> The use of upper-case letters on words like "King" in this psalm is a theological and eisegetical/canonical but not exegetical/historical/cultural/contextual interpretation or translation. It puts ideas in the author's mind that could not be there (or at least he does not express them clearly). Hebrew does not use upper-case letters so in versions these features do not follow the original text. As mentioned already, Psalm 2 may well indeed legitimately be framed as a retrospective foreshadowing of God's ultimate King and Son on an applicational interpretive level, but to translate words in this psalm as "Son" and "King" and "Anointed" suggests a theology being communicated that the audience would not have noticed, and if it did, would not have understood. Whatever was being communicated was for the mental world of these ancient Hebrews. Any interpretation that is not objectively supported by the context and language being used (i.e. that is between the lines or "hidden" or what God knows that the author doesn't) is subjective and unverifiable and so is more commentary than translation or exegesis. It cannot, then, be authoritative if unauthenticated. Attempts at NT cross-reference "proofs" are anachronistic and produce canonical idea unknown to those living when this psalm was composed. The NT is clear that the OT is useful and to be used by Christians, but we have to let these texts speak for themselves in their own contexts and not misuse and abuse them for apologetical purposes. "Son" here suggests a Trinitarian ideology foreign to the OT as does the frequent use of "Spirit" in English OT versions. A translation should not be a commentary, although explanatory footnotes are welcome. The day the first OT and NT were glued together did not stop these texts' statements and books from having literary, linguistic, and life settings that control what a given writer or speaker meant by how ancient words were used to speak to an ancient audience. We have to accept these texts as they are and bridge these gaps in culture and communication to best determine what they say to us today.

<sup>17</sup> NIV speaks of the "Son" twice (vv. 7, 12). But some other versions only in verse 7. The usual word for "son" (בן) is in the former, but in the latter verse the term בר is used, and the entire verse has textual issues. בר is Aramaic for "son" but why make the switch? In the consonantal text בן could be mistaken for בר. Some propose that the verse begins after "with fear" in verse 11. An alternate Hebrew manuscript adds "with joy" (בשמחה) at that point. Instead of "rejoice with trembling" at the end of verse 11 (NIV), JPS has "tremble with fright" (cf. NRSV; but all admit the Hebrew here and in v. 12 is uncertain). NETS (LXX rendering in English) has: "rejoice in him with trembling." <sup>12</sup>Seize upon instruction, lest the Lord be angry." Corrupted transmission in the copying process seems likely. The בר following "kiss" in verse 12 is likely a dittography from the same letters in "with trembling" (ברעדה) in verse 11. The וגיל "rejoice" of verse 11 may have originally been רגל "feet"; hence NRSV has "... kiss his feet . . .," which

fits the context ordering them to “serve YHWH with fear!” (v. 11a). See text critical notes in BHS for verses 11–12.

<sup>18</sup> The versions are misleading when they parallel “rule” and “dash to pieces” (cf. NIV e.g.). The word rendered “you will rule” is Hebrew הָרַעַם from the root רָעַע but this is a homographic root. Which רָעַע did the poet intend? The most obvious answer is one that best parallels or is restated by the verb in the following line of the bi-colon: נָפַץ “shatter.” Some choose “rule” following the Greek OT (LXX; the Syriac version has the equivalent), which has ποιμαίνεις “you will shepherd” (since these translators thought the Hebrew root word was רָעַע). Latin Vulgate also follows LXX with *pasces*. But the context and poetic parallelism support “break” (recognized by NASB and ESV). The Luther Bible (1912 version) uses *zerschlagen* “smash” (cf. JPS).

<sup>19</sup> This is then a parallelism that restates the verbal idea of “smashing” but also the second line of the bi-colon moves from stating the nature of the weapon used (iron) to the outcome of this king’s attack (reduced to rubble). The two construct genitives (rod of; pots of) are syntactically material (made of) and then agency (made by) or possession (owned by). שֵׁבֶט (“scepter” in NIV) can also be used for “rod” or “tribe” and כְּלֵי (“pieces of” in NIV) can be used for “vessels” or “weapons” (all these choices of course dependent on context). The יוֹצֵר is a “potter” typically but it can refer to a “thrower, caster” (Zech 11:13; cf. HALOT s.v. יוֹצֵר). To use Kugel’s minimalist parallelism: (A) This king will use strong means (then B) to bring about these rebels’ crushing defeat (pictured as smashed pots in a pottery store). Cf. James Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and its History* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998, reprint ed.); but more nuance is needed in practice. Lowth’s pioneering approach that found three general categories for bi-cola in the OT (synonymous; antithetical; synthetic) is an oversimplification (but then Kugel is more simplified or reductionistic; cf. Robert Lowth, *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews* (<https://archive.org/details/lecturesonsacred00lowth/page/n6>). While “synonymous” is rejected in current scholarship, the fact of numerous parallel lines in OT poetry that are static (where line B really offers little or no change) needs more attention and analysis. Restatement does appear to be a valid descriptor in some if not many cases. If the “potter” can be viewed as a “manufacturer” then we may have a restatement with 2:9, “you will break them with an iron rod // you will shatter them as (with) a crafted weapon.” Is it possible the preposition before “utensil/weapon” (the כ) was originally a כּ (as the one before “rod”)? The Hebrew letters כ and כּ are easily confused.

<sup>20</sup> Kraus suggests that the Hebrew word for “the wicked” (הַרְשָׁעִים) in 1:5 may have legal and cultic connotations. For the latter, in relation to YHWH’s *tôrah* “law,” the “wicked” person is one who has already been found guilty of transgression the law and is, thereby, banned from worship in the holy place. Cf. Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 119. He also refers to but rejects the application here of Köhler’s comment that the accused person would kneel or lie on the ground while awaiting the verdict; Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 119, citing Köhler, *Hebrew Man* (1956), 155.



<sup>21</sup> Peterson speaks of Psalm 1 a concentrating on one person and Psalm 2 on politics. Cf. Goldingay, *Psalms 1–41*, Logos version, 2019, n.p., citing Eugene Peterson, *Where Your Treasure Is* (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1991, rept.), 10.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. David Noel Freedman, “What the Ass and the Ox Know—But the Scholars Don’t.” *Bible Review* (February 1985) 42–43. Freedman demonstrates how Isaiah 1:3a is understood best by observing that the word “manger” in 3a<sub>ii</sub> has to be read back into the previous parallel line so that the ox and the ass “know” (i.e. remember) the same thing, i.e. the master’s (manger) in 3a<sub>i</sub> and the (master’s) trough in 3a<sub>ii</sub>. Not only can the first line of a parallelism provide a word understood as repeated in the second line, the reverse also happens (i.e. the second line contains a thought understood in the first line; hence the phenomenon of “reverse parallelism” in Hebrew poetry; significant for exegesis). Also note in light of the surrounding discussion in the present paper that “know” in Isaiah 1:3 is the same Hebrew word as in Psalm 1. And only means intellectual knowledge or awareness, although of course in the former this is knowledge possessed by animals. The form in Isaiah is a *qatal*, completed or past action, so literally “he knew” (understood as repeated in the second line), but is regularly translated “knows” in context (as the participle in Psalm 1:6a and 37:18a, where YHWH knows the days of the blameless. And how is this intimate since He knows about events?). The participle in Hebrew often conveys the present tense. The verb in 1:6b is a *yiqtol* (future tense often but also present). So Psalm 1:6 could be saying that YHWH knows the effects of the actions of people doing right remain while those of people doing wrong perish. It is interesting that the vowel points for the participle and for the *yiqtol* are the same (since the latter is irregular, beginning with a guttural letter). But perhaps the original text had a participle or *yiqtol* for both (although the original text was only consonants, which would suggest the initial pronoun *yod* on “perish” was added, and the participle or *qatal* forms would have been original).

<sup>23</sup> F. Delitzsch made reference to Psalm 37:18, where the same participle for “know” is used. Cf. F. Delitzsch, *Psalms, Three vols. in one*, Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes, C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973, reprint), 87. He claims this is intimate knowledge (*nosse con affectu et effectu*), but offer no real proof other than this cross reference. All the Jewish Soncino commentary has to say is that the knowing (“regardeth”) has to do with causing the righteous to prosper. They and the wicked get what is coming to them, reward or retribution, respectively. Cf. A. Cohen, *The Psalms*, Soncino Books of the Bible (New York: The Soncino Press, 1945), 2. This is Rabbinic not contextual exegesis. Anderson also stresses relational knowledge but only for the righteous, since His knowledge of the wicked would be only intellectual. This sounds too much like the influence of modern preaching than the ANE context and that these people are most likely all Hebrews/Israelites (people of the covenant, who can all make good and bad choices). Besides “watch over” he points out others who use the translation “preserveth” and even “loves.” Cf. A. A. Anderson, *Psalms 1–72*, The New Century Bible Commentary, ed. Clements and Black (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 63. Kraus offers that “know” mean taking care of someone with affectionate concern, and refers

to Buber's explanation that it has to do not with contemplation but contact. Cf. Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 120.

<sup>24</sup> Gillingham takes verses 5 and 6 together as providing a double dose on the fate of the “wicked” in contrast with the “righteous.” Remarkably even a scholar of her caliber still speaks of “synonymous” parallelism in 1:5 and “antithetical” in verse 6 (notwithstanding Kugel’s now well-received dismissal of Lowth’s categories; which do need revision but Kugel’s one category for all parallelism [A, what’s more B] can be criticized as too reductionistic or minimalist; cf. Kugel, *The Idea*, n. 15 above. One is hard pressed to demonstrate how numerous OT bi-cola actually have real added value and advancement in the second line. Those who loathe Lowth’s three categories may be going too far). For Gillingham 1:5 indicates the bad guys will be judged and condemned by the good guys. 1:6 contrasts how God knows (i.e. cherishes) those who do right but will make those who do wrong perish. In reception history much focus is given to these two verses. Cf. Gillingham, “An Introduction to Reception History,” n.p. (see n. 7 above).

<sup>25</sup> HALOT recognizes usages like “hordes” or “tribal people” (s.v. הָרָבִיּוֹת), p. 513 in HALOT Accordance version 3.5, 2000.

<sup>26</sup> Even the Evangelical *Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (NIV) accepts that “Anointed One” refers to “any anointed king who was seated on the throne of David” (Accordance abridged 2 vol. version 1.5, *EBC*, ed. Barker [Zondervan, 1994], ¶ 10730.

<sup>27</sup> Bradley’s review of Gillingham (cf. n. 6 above) makes the important statements that reception history of these two psalms enable us to understand better (1) *why* a text is read affects *how* it is read; (2) how the reader’s context influences the possible number of readings; and (3) the literal sense. Cf. Bradley, “The Value of Reception History for Theological Interpretation,” 43–44. <https://search.proquest.com/religion/docview/1750209965/fulltextPDF/13860D0874B849EEPQ/1?accountid=31623>. Accessed 14. Aug 2019.



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