

Waltke, Psalms, Session 2, Psalm 1: Wicket Gate to the Psalter Resources from Notebooklm

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Study Guide, 4) Briefing Document, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Waltke, Psalms, Session 2, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Psalm 1: Wicket Gate to the Psalter

This lecture by Dr. Bruce Waltke focuses on Psalm 1, framing it as the "wicket gate" to the Psalter, emphasizing its instructional role in preparing the reader for ethical worship. He then explores the psalm's translation challenges, particularly regarding inclusive language and the meaning of "blessed." Waltke further analyzes the psalm's structure, using metaphors like "tree" and "chaff" to illustrate the contrasting paths of the righteous and the wicked. Finally, he examines key terms such as "righteous," "law," and "way," clarifying their nuances within the context of the psalm and broader scripture. The lecture concludes with a discussion of the psalm's poetic structure and rhetorical devices.

**2. 16-minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of
Dr. Waltke's, Psalms, Session 2 – Double click icon to play in
Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL]
Site and click the audio podcast link there (Old Testament →
Psalms → Waltke).**



**Waltke_Psalms_Sess
ion02_Psalm1_Wicke**

3. Briefing Document

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the main themes and important ideas from the provided lecture transcript by Dr. Bruce Waltke on Psalm 1:

Briefing Document: Dr. Bruce Waltke on Psalm 1 – “Wicked Gate to the Psalter”

Introduction:

This document summarizes the key points of Dr. Bruce Waltke's lecture on Psalm 1, which he titles “Wicked Gate to the Psalter.” Waltke frames Psalm 1 as the crucial entry point to understanding the entire book of Psalms. He argues that this psalm is not primarily about worship or petition, but rather about instruction and ethical preparation, emphasizing a life of dependence on God, not legalistic adherence to rules. He uses the analogy of the “wicket gate” from *Pilgrim's Progress*, highlighting that there is no third way: one must pass through the ethical preparation of Psalm 1 to properly engage with the rest of the Psalms.

Key Themes and Ideas:

1. Psalm Typology:

- Waltke categorizes Psalms into three main types:
- **Hymns:** Including sub-types like Songs of Zion and Enthronement songs.
- **Petition Psalms:** Characterized by direct address to God, lament/complaint, confidence, petition, and praise. Waltke notes the difference between “lament” and “complaint” within these psalms. He also observes that some psalms (like Psalm 63) may be lament without a direct petition, finding a solution in remembering God.
- **Instruction Psalms:** These are didactic and teach ethical principles. Psalm 1 falls into this category.
- Waltke emphasizes that Psalm 1 is NOT a petition or praise psalm but an instructional psalm which must come first because “God does not want worship from unclean hands.”
- He highlights the teaching function of the Psalms, making the book didactic.
- He says “You don't enter into worship until you're prepared ethically...immediately we have to go through Psalm 1 in order to enter into that we were acting the way God wants us to do.”

1. "Wicket Gate" Metaphor:

- Drawing from *Pilgrim's Progress*, Waltke uses the "wicket gate" analogy to emphasize that Psalm 1 is an unavoidable threshold.
- "There's no third way. You either go through it or you don't go through it. And if you don't go through it, you have no place in the book of Psalms.
- He states that one must pass through the ethical principles presented in Psalm 1 to proceed into the rest of the Psalms.

1. Inclusive Language:

- Waltke discusses the challenge of translating the Hebrew word "ish," often translated as "man," into inclusive language.
- He argues that "ish" refers to the "individual" in contrast to others, not specifically to the male gender and cites Proverbs in support of the inclusion of mothers in the process.
- He explains that the NIV translation committee shifted to "person" or "those who" to address gender inclusivity, particularly avoiding the use of exclusively male pronouns in the third person.
- "When you get to the third person singular, it's either he or she, and that's the problem. And if I say he, I eliminate the she. And so, and I don't think that was the intention. It didn't intend to exclude the woman."

1. Meaning of "Blessed" (Asherah):

- Waltke differentiates between two Hebrew words for "bless": "barach" (filled with the potency for life) and "asherah" (having a blessed destiny, linked to a future reward and one's present relationship with God).
- He argues that "asherah," used in Psalm 1, is not adequately translated by "happy." "The blessed person, when you use Asherah, may be in deep trouble at the time."
- He emphasizes that "asherah" indicates a person who may be facing challenges but is assured of a positive future because of their relationship with God.
- He suggests "how fortunate" as a more nuanced translation, capturing both present and future implications.
- "So the blessed person is a person who has this great reward in the future."

1. Figurative Language and Metaphors:

- Waltke stresses that poetry is figurative, concrete, and terse, and that this must be considered when interpreting the Psalms.
- He identifies the two dominant metaphors in Psalm 1: the tree vs. chaff and the way metaphor.
- He breaks down the "way" metaphor into four components (which he alliterates with "C"):
- **Character:** Disposition of the heart. He asserts that this is sovereignly given by God. "The first cause of all good is God. Every good and perfect gift comes from God."
- **Context:** Community and identity with the saints.
- **Conduct:** The actions and steps taken on the way.
- **Consequences:** Nexus of cause, deed, and result.
- He also notes that this is an "inclusio" by opening with the way and closing with the way.
- "It begins with the metaphor of way. It ends with the metaphor of way...God knows that way. And therefore, because God is spirit, he's there in that way. You're participating in eternal life because you're in with God, his way, his character, that's life."
- He contrasts this with the way of the wicked where "God is not there at all. Therefore, it's death."

1. The Righteous vs. The Wicked:

- Waltke defines the righteous as those who disadvantage themselves to advantage others, while the wicked disadvantage others to advantage themselves.
- He quotes Thomas Creech's definition of the righteous in relation to God and humanity:
- **In relation to God:** They depend on God for protection, plead for forgiveness, worship in humility, align themselves with God's righteousness, feed on the word, find access to God through prayer, and relate to God as a servant to a king.

- **In relation to humanity:** They love and serve their neighbors; faith and obedience are inseparable; they have clean hands and a pure heart. Ethics begins with dependence upon God, not on adherence to a legal code.
- He notes a key distinction: the righteous are God-absorbed, while the wicked are self-absorbed.
- He emphasizes that the righteous depend on God and do not seek to avenge themselves, relying on God's justice.
- He notes that “the wicked are self-absorbed. The righteous are God-absorbed. And that's the radical difference.”

1. **Meaning of "Law" (Torah):**

- Waltke explains that "Torah" means teaching or catechetical instruction, not legalistic law with penalties.
- He says “the 10 commandments have no penalties to them. They're a way of life. It's a catechism.”
- He argues that the Torah in Psalm 1 refers specifically to the Mosaic Law, emphasizing its consistency with the rest of the Old Testament.
- He says “any teaching in the Old Testament must be consistent with Moses. It's the touchstone.”
- He highlights the importance of seeing Sinai as greater than Zion in the book of Psalms, meaning Zion is always subject to God's law.
- He concludes that "the teaching then was the book of Psalms."

1. **Rhetorical Structure:**

- Waltke describes the "stitching effect" of Psalm 1, alternating between positive (righteous) and negative (wicked) imagery.
- He also identifies a concentric parallelism structure, dividing the psalm into halves focused on the way of the righteous and the way of the wicked.
- He ultimately focuses on three quatrains in his exposition: cause, consequence pictured, and consequence stated. *He identifies the two figures of speech in the first part as “anabasis” and “katabasis.” Anabasis is building up from “counsel” to “seat.” Katabasis is slowing down from “walk” to “sit.”

1. **Progressive Hardening into Sin:**

- Waltke highlights how verse one demonstrates a progressive hardening into sin: first, one walks in the counsel of the wicked; then stands in the way of sinners; and finally sits in the seat of scoffers.
- He states that this goes from a way of thinking to a way of behaving to a way of identifying.
- He illustrates this point through the story of Alexander Pope, Medusa, and Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde.
- He makes the point that our culture has become hardened to sin because of how frequently we are exposed to it. He warns against the “Medusa box.”
- He says the heart is hardened through the progressive stages of vice.
- He highlights that “evil took over, triumphed, and destroyed him [Dr. Jekyll].”

1. **Dependence vs. Legalism:**

- He poses the question: Why does the law represent life for the righteous and death for the wicked?
- His answer is that the righteous approach the law from a stance of dependence on God, while the wicked (like the Pharisees) approach it with a legalistic mindset.
- He emphasizes the importance of a “new heart” that delights in God’s teaching.
- He says “He [the righteous] can't take his eyes off the teachings. He loves it.”
- He also distinguishes Paul’s attitude toward the Law from the Psalms’ attitude toward the Law: that while Paul came to reject the Law as a Pharisee, the righteous in the Psalms find delight in it.
- **Application for Christians:** He argues that “we’re not limited to the Torah of Moses. We have the whole word of God and especially the Torah of our Lord Jesus, because he's our Lord.”
- He sees meditating on God's word as analogous to a cow chewing its cud, in contrast to a dog gulping down food.
- He interprets the "streams of water" as canals coming from a source of life, the word of God.

- He uses the illustration of a canal system flowing from a temple as a metaphor for the life-giving word of God, and the idea of a via sacra leading to the temple and the altar before the temple as a depiction of the path of righteousness.

Conclusion:

Waltke's lecture emphasizes Psalm 1 as a foundational text for entering the Psalter. He highlights the ethical and spiritual preparation necessary for engaging with the rest of the book, centering on dependence on God, a focus on a blessed destiny, and the importance of avoiding the progressive hardening that leads to the path of the wicked. His interpretation is rooted in understanding the nuances of the Hebrew text, poetry, and figures of speech, and his explanation of the meaning of key words like "blessed," "righteous," and "law" provide a rich foundation for understanding the theological depth of the Psalms.

4. Study Guide Psalm 1: Gateway to the Psalter - Study Guide

Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 sentences based on the provided lecture material.

1. What are the three main categories of Psalms according to Dr. Waltke?
2. What are the five distinct motifs found in Petition Psalms?
3. Why does Dr. Waltke refer to Psalm 1 as the "wicket gate" to the Psalter?
4. What is the translational difficulty presented by the Hebrew word "ish" in Psalm 1?
5. What is the difference between the Hebrew words *barach* and *asherah* when translated to "blessed"?
6. How does the lecture explain the phrase "does not stand in the way of sinners" in the context of translation?
7. What four alliterated "C's" does Dr. Waltke use to explain the metaphor of "way" in Psalm 1?
8. How does the lecture define the characteristics of the "righteous" in relation to God and others?
9. What does Dr. Waltke say is the meaning of "Torah" and what does it refer to within the Psalms?
10. Explain the dual figures of speech, anabasis and katabasis, used in the description of the "wicked" in Psalm 1.

Quiz Answer Key

1. The three main categories of Psalms are **Hymns**, **Petition Psalms**, and **Instruction Psalms**. Hymns include subcategories like Songs of Zion and enthronement songs; Petition Psalms include elements of lament, confidence, and petition; and Instruction Psalms are didactic in nature.
2. The five motifs found in Petition Psalms include a **direct address to God**, an **introductory petition**, a **lament or complaint**, a **section on confidence**, and the **actual petition itself**, though not all elements are always present.

3. Dr. Waltke uses the metaphor of the "wicket gate" from *Pilgrim's Progress* to describe Psalm 1 as the **necessary entry point for ethical preparation before engaging in worship** found within the rest of the Psalter. He emphasizes that there is no "third way;" either one passes through Psalm 1 or has no place in the book of Psalms.
4. The Hebrew word "ish" is often translated as "man," but it can mean an **individual person** in contrast to a group. The challenge for translators is making it more inclusive, as a strictly male translation leaves out the woman who are included in the spirit of the text.
5. The Hebrew word *barach* means **to be filled with the potency for life** and to reproduce, both physically and spiritually. *Asherah*, on the other hand, means that you have a **blessed destiny** based upon one's present relationship with God.
6. The traditional word-for-word translation, "does not stand in the way of sinners," might suggest that believers shouldn't oppose sinners. To accurately capture the meaning, the NIV translates it as "does not stand in the way sinners take," thus emphasizing **the path or lifestyle taken by sinners, not the sinners themselves**.
7. Dr. Waltke explains the metaphor of "way" using the four alliterated "C's": **Character**, which speaks to disposition; **Context**, community; **Conduct**, how we walk; and **Consequence**, the results of our chosen path.
8. The righteous are **dependent on God for protection, plead for forgiveness, and worship God in humility**. They also **love and serve their neighbors** and understand that faith in God and obedience to Him are inseparable.
9. Dr. Waltke defines "Torah" as **catechetical instruction or teaching** rather than a legal code with penalties. In the Psalms, he believes the term refers specifically to the **Mosaic law**, acting as a touchstone of truth.
10. The dual figures of speech, anabasis and katabasis, describe how the wicked progressively harden into sin. **Anabasis is a heightening effect, moving from thought to behavior to identity with sin** while **katabasis is a slowing down moving from walking, to standing, to sitting**; this illustrates the hardening and desensitization to sin.

Essay Questions

Instructions: Respond to each question with a well-organized essay that synthesizes concepts from the source material.

1. Analyze the significance of Psalm 1 as the "wicket gate" to the Psalter, exploring its function as an introduction and ethical prerequisite.
2. Compare and contrast the characteristics of the "righteous" and the "wicked" as outlined in the lecture, focusing on their relationship with God and their actions within the community.
3. Explain how Dr. Waltke addresses the challenges of translating the Hebrew text of Psalm 1 into contemporary inclusive language while preserving its theological richness.
4. Discuss the use of metaphors, such as "way" and "tree," in Psalm 1, and analyze their role in conveying the psalm's central message about living a blessed life.
5. Evaluate the practical implications of Dr. Waltke's interpretation of Psalm 1 for modern Christian faith and practice.

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Psalter:** The book of Psalms in the Old Testament.
- **Hymn:** A type of psalm focused on praise, often subdivided into songs of Zion and enthronement songs.
- **Petition Psalm:** A type of psalm characterized by direct address to God, lament, confidence, petition, and praise.
- **Instruction Psalm:** A type of psalm that is didactic or teaching in nature.
- **Wicket Gate:** A metaphor from *Pilgrim's Progress* used to describe Psalm 1 as the entry point to the Psalter.
- **Ish:** Hebrew word often translated as "man," but can also mean an individual person, causing translation difficulties when considering inclusivity.
- **Barach:** Hebrew word for "blessed" meaning to be filled with the potency for life.
- **Asherah:** Hebrew word for "blessed" meaning to have a blessed destiny based on present relationship with God.
- **Anabasis:** A figure of speech denoting a building up or heightening in intensity.
- **Katabasis:** A figure of speech denoting a slowing down or diminishing in intensity.
- **Way:** A dominant metaphor in the Psalms and Scripture, representing character, context, conduct, and consequence.

- **Righteous:** Those who are God-dependent, disadvantage themselves to advantage others, love and serve their neighbors, and align themselves with God.
- **Wicked:** Those who are self-absorbed, disadvantage others to advantage themselves, oppose the righteous, and are ultimately spiritually dead.
- **Torah:** Hebrew word meaning "teaching" or "instruction," often referring to the Mosaic law.
- **Inclusio:** A literary device where the beginning and end of a section have similar elements or themes.
- **Concentric Parallelism:** A literary structure where ideas are mirrored in an "A-B-B-A" pattern.
- **Rhetorical Criticism:** The study of how a text is structured and put together to achieve its purpose.

5. FAQ on Session 2, Psalm 1 and the Nature of the Psalms

1. **What are the main categories of Psalms, and where does Psalm 1 fit in?** The Psalms are broadly categorized into hymns (which include songs of Zion and songs celebrating the Lord as King), petition Psalms (characterized by lament, confidence, and requests), and instruction Psalms. Psalm 1 is classified as an instruction psalm. It acts as a "wicket gate," an ethical and moral entry point to the rest of the Psalter. It emphasizes that worship is unacceptable without moral preparation and right living.
2. **What is the significance of the term "blessed" in Psalm 1, and how does it relate to happiness?** The Hebrew word for "blessed" used in Psalm 1 is "asherah." It signifies a blessed destiny based on one's present relationship with God. This is different from "barach," another word for blessing that indicates being filled with the potency of life and fruitfulness. "Asherah" is often related to a future reward and is better translated as "how fortunate" rather than merely "happy." The blessed person may even be experiencing difficulty, but has a blessed destiny because of their relationship to God.
3. **Why does Psalm 1 use the metaphor of a "way," and what are the four C's that help us understand this metaphor?** The metaphor of a "way" is central to Psalm 1 and is also a dominant metaphor throughout the Scriptures. The "way" speaks to one's character, a basic disposition or inclination of the heart; one's context, the community and environment in which one lives and the values upheld; one's conduct, the specific actions and behaviors that follow; and finally, the consequences resulting from one's chosen way.
4. **How does the psalm depict the progression of wickedness, and what does the imagery of the Medusa and Dr. Jekyll illustrate?** Psalm 1 illustrates a progressive hardening into sin through the progression from "walking" in the counsel of the wicked, to "standing" in the way of sinners, to "sitting" in the seat of scoffers. This involves both a heightening in the level of sin, and a slowing or a hardening into it. The Medusa myth shows how prolonged exposure to wickedness can desensitize one to sin, turning the heart to stone. Similarly, Dr. Jekyll's transformation into Mr. Hyde illustrates how dabbling in evil can ultimately lead to complete corruption and moral decay without even active intent.
5. **What does it mean for the righteous to delight in the "law" (Torah) of the Lord, and how does it differ from legalism?** In this context, Torah means catechetical instruction and is not merely a legal code with penalties. To "delight" in the law

suggests a love and dependence on God's teachings, a heart-felt orientation that is very different from legalism which seeks to adhere to a code. This delight reflects a new heart and a dependence upon God, not an attempt to achieve righteousness through self-effort. The Law is understood to be a way of life rooted in gratitude and hope, not a burdensome taskmaster.

6. **What is the significance of the imagery of a tree planted by streams of water, and how does it contrast with the image of chaff?** The image of a tree planted by canals represents the life-giving effect of God's word and a life rooted in God. The canals are likened to the river of life that flows from the temple. This tree symbolizes fruitfulness, stability, and eternal life. In contrast, chaff symbolizes those who do not have life within them, who are rootless and powerless, and who ultimately lack enduring value, thus are easily blown away. The tree is an image of prosperity in the here and now and also in the future, whereas the chaff lacks life and future.
7. **According to this lecture, what is the core difference between the righteous and the wicked, and how does this affect their relationship with God and others?** The core difference is that the righteous are God-absorbed, relying totally on God for their strength and guidance. They are people of faith who depend on God for protection, plead for forgiveness and worship God in humility, as well as loving and serving their neighbors. The wicked, on the other hand, are self-absorbed, and seek to advantage themselves at any cost, lacking true dependence on God. The righteous, when wronged by the wicked, do not take vengeance into their own hands but trust that God will ultimately bring justice.
8. **What are some of the translation challenges in Psalm 1, particularly regarding inclusive language?** One major challenge is the use of the Hebrew word "ish," traditionally translated as "man." While it can mean individual person, it has been seen by some as specifically male, which can be seen as non-inclusive. The singular pronoun also presents issues, as in English the use of "he" may exclude "she." Modern translators often shift to using plural pronouns like "those who" and "they" to be more inclusive. The challenge is that in making these changes to make it more inclusive, some of the original nuances of the Hebrew may be lost.