

Psalms 1:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away.

Analysis

The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away.

This verse abruptly shifts from the blessed person's vitality to the ungodly person's emptiness. The emphatic "not so" starkly contrasts the two ways of living. While the righteous are like deeply rooted trees, the ungodly are like worthless chaff—the thin husks separated from grain during winnowing.

"Chaff" (motz, מוֹצַח) represents what is worthless, lightweight, and temporary. Unlike the substantial, fruitful tree, chaff lacks weight, value, and permanence. The image captures the emptiness of life apart from God—appearing to exist but lacking substance and purpose.

"Which the wind driveth away" emphasizes instability and lack of control. While the tree is firmly planted and nourished, chaff is at the mercy of every wind, driven wherever circumstances blow. This suggests the ungodly lack both rootedness in truth and ability to withstand life's storms.

Historical Context

Winnowing was a familiar agricultural process in ancient Israel. Farmers would toss threshed grain into the air, allowing wind to blow away the light chaff while heavier grain fell back down. The chaff was then burned or left to blow away as worthless waste. This daily agricultural activity provided a powerful visual for spiritual realities.

The imagery recalls several prophetic passages using winnowing as a metaphor for divine judgment (Isaiah 17:13, Jeremiah 13:24, Hosea 13:3). John the Baptist would later use similar imagery to describe the Messiah's judgment (Matthew 3:12).

The stark contrast between tree and chaff reflects wisdom literature's tendency toward binary categories—righteous versus wicked, wise versus foolish. While acknowledging gradations in practice, the fundamental orientation is either toward God or away from Him.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. What aspects of modern culture resemble 'chaff'—appearing substantial but ultimately worthless and temporary?
2. How can believers distinguish between temporary setbacks and fundamental lack of spiritual substance in their lives?
3. What evidence of being 'driven by the wind' might indicate insufficient rootedness in God's truth?

