

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, γν) 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?

Interlinear Text

לֹא | יְמִינֵי כִּי רְשָׁעִים אֵם כִּי
H3808 H3651 The ungodly H7563

אֲשֶׁר כַּאֲזֶן כַּאֲשֶׁר
H518 are not so but are like the chaff H4671

אֲשֶׁר

רֹמֶם: תְּמַפֵּה כִּי
driveth away which the wind
H5086 H7307

Additional Cross-References

Job 21:18 (Parallel theme): They are as stubble before the wind, and as chaff that the storm carrieth away.

Matthew 3:12 (Parallel theme): Whose fan is in his hand, and he will throughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

Psalms 35:5 (Parallel theme): Let them be as chaff before the wind: and let the angel of the LORD chase them.

Isaiah 17:13 (References God): The nations shall rush like the rushing of many waters: but God shall rebuke them, and they shall flee far off, and shall be chased as the chaff of the mountains before the wind, and like a rolling thing before the whirlwind.

Hosea 13:3 (Parallel theme): Therefore they shall be as the morning cloud, and as the early dew that passeth away, as the chaff that is driven with the whirlwind out of the floor, and as the smoke out of the chimney.

Isaiah 29:5 (Parallel theme): Moreover the multitude of thy strangers shall be like small dust, and the multitude of the terrible ones shall be as chaff that passeth away: yea, it shall be at an instant suddenly.