

Psalm 119

A COMMENTARY OUTLINE

THE GOLDEN ABC'S
OF THE WORD OF GOD

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Preface

THE FORM OF PSALM 119

The Hebrew psalter contains a number of acrostic, or alphabetic, psalms. An acrostic poem in Hebrew is one in which the initial letters of the lines form the alphabet in order. Psalms 9, 10, 25, 34, 37, 111, 112 and 145 are examples; but Psalm 119 is the most elaborate and complete.

There are twenty-two letters in the Hebrew alphabet. Under each of these letters, we find eight one-line verses, each beginning with the Hebrew letter that corresponds to its heading. This displays the intricate detail and artistic structure of the psalm. It has didactic value as well, since neat arrangement leads to orderly thinking.

The Lord (Yahweh) is mentioned twenty-two times, which is appropriate to the twenty-two letter divisions of the psalm.

Eight synonyms for Scripture are used.

SCRIPTURE IS CALLED THE “LAW” (*torah*)

The word means *instruction flowing from divine revelation*. In a narrow sense it refers to the law of Moses. Here it is used in its widest sense and is synonymous with the word of God. It views God as *teacher*.

SCRIPTURE IS CALLED THE “WORD” (*dabar*)

This refers to anything that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord. It is the broad term for divine revelation. It implies the means by which God has spoken—human language. Divine revelation is not conceptual but verbal. It views God as *communicator*.

SCRIPTURE IS CALLED THE “WORD” (*imrah*)

This is derived from a verb meaning *to say*. It refers to anything God has said, promised, or commanded. Notice there are two distinct words translated “word” in NASB.

SCRIPTURE IS CALLED “TESTIMONY” (*adhah*)

It is derived from a word that means *to testify* or *witness*. When God had finished speaking with Moses on Mt. Sinai, He gave him the “two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written by the finger of God (Exodus 31:18).” It views God as *source of absolutes*.

SCRIPTURE IS CALLED “PRECEPTS” (*pikudh*)

This word is used only in the psalms and is from a root meaning *to visit, to appoint*. It refers to a charge and thus anything the Lord has ordered. It views God as the *definer of duty*.

SCRIPTURE IS CALLED “STATUTES” (*hok*)

This word comes from a root that means *to engrave* and refers to something prescribed. It views God as *guide*.

SCRIPTURE IS CALLED “COMMANDMENTS” (*mitsvah*)

As is clear from the English translation, it refers to all things that God has commanded. It views God as *demanding duty*.

SCRIPTURE IS CALLED “JUDGMENTS” (*mishpat*)

This word denotes legal decisions. These are the case laws that furnish the basis for Israel’s legal system. In Psalm 119 it refers to the decision made by God, the *supreme judge*.

Some also take the words *way* and *truth* to be descriptive of the Scriptures.

Psalm 119 is the longest of the psalms and certainly the longest chapter in the Bible. This is appropriate: Too much cannot be said for the word of God. The godly man never tires of extolling the word.

THE THEME OF PSALM 119

The theme of Psalm 119 is what the word of God *is* and *does*. It is mentioned in every verse with a couple of possible exceptions. The theme incorporates the varied responses of men to it. The word of God is to be exalted along with God’s name. Psalm 138:2b reads literally, “for you have exalted above all things your name and your word.”

THE AUTHOR OF PSALM 119

The psalm is autobiographical. The author is apparently a young man who writes of his relationship to the word of God. “How can a young man keep his way pure?” he asks (119:9). Because of his possession of the word of God, he says, “I have more insight than all my teachers...I understand more than the aged...(119:99-100).”

The young man is oppressed by those who despise the word of God. “Even though princes sit and talk against me, Thy servant meditates on Thy statutes (119:23).” Similar words are found in (119:46 and 161).

In spite of the opposition, the young man is seen as growing. "My soul languishes for Thy salvation; I wait for Thy word," and "They almost destroyed me on earth, but as for me, I did not forsake Thy precepts" (119:81, 87). As one examines the text of Psalm 119, the progress of the young man in his walk with God becomes evident. Perhaps it should be thought of as an Old Testament *Pilgrim's Progress*. It is our prayer that this commentary will result in *your* progress.

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Aleph

*“The Complete Happiness of One
Who Obeys God’s Word”*

Psalm 119:1-8

THEME

Each of the eight verses makes reference to obedience. In verses 1 and 3, the words *walk in the law of the LORD* and *walk in His ways* appear. In verse 2, he speaks of those who *observe* it; and in verses 4, 5, and 8, the verb *keep* expresses the idea of obedience. Verse 6 speaks of those who *look upon* it and verse 7 of those who *learn* it.

Connected to the idea of obedience is the double repetition of the word *happiness*. The word opens line 1 and line 2 and is not repeated again in the rest of the psalm. Happiness through obedience is the keynote of Psalm 119.

SHORT OUTLINE

- A. The Description of the Happy Man 119:1-3
- B. The Duty of the Happy Man 119:4
- C. The Desire of the Happy Man 119:5
- D. The Destination of the Happy Man 119:6-8

COMMENTARY

THE DESCRIPTION OF THE HAPPY MAN 119:1-3

“How blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the LORD. ²How blessed are those who observe His testimonies, who seek Him with all their heart. ³They also do no unrighteousness; they walk in His ways.”

The flow of the psalmist's thought is as follows:

- I see what a man can be (119:1-3).
- It is my duty to be this kind of man (119:4).
- Oh, that I were that man (119:5-8)!

The opening verses plunge us into the midst of the subject of the psalm—the enormous advantages of those who love and obey the word of God. Only because the persons spoken of walk in obedience to God's instruction do they become the subjects of this beatitude. God's law is always to be sought for the purpose of obeying it, never for the sake of theoretical knowledge.

The psalm opens with the repetition of the word *blessed*, a term that occurs nowhere else in this psalm. It comes from a verb that means *to go straight*. Happiness finds its source in straight living, that is, adherence to the right path without deviation. In the Old Testament, sin is often viewed in terms of deviation from a path laid out by God.

There are two words that are translated *blessed* in the Old Testament. The distinction between the two is important. One refers to a condition that comes about by man doing something. The other describes an action initiated by God irrespective of human merit or demerit. It is the former that is used here. The man who is blessed must do something in order to arrive at this condition. The context shows that condition to be obedience to the word of God.

The word *blessed* in verses 1 and 2 is plural in each case, which denotes completeness and fullness. We could bring out this meaning by translating each “completely and fully happy.”

We learn immediately where happiness is found. It is discovered in the last place most men and women look for it—in obedience to the word of God. Happiness is not found by pursuit; it is a by-product of obedience to the word of God.

The fully happy man is described as one *whose way is blameless*. The word *way* is found twelve times in this psalm. It may refer to the revealed will of God, as in 119:14, 27, 32, 33, and 37). It may also refer to one's course of life—one's “lifestyle,” which could be evil, as in 119:29, 101, 104, and 128, or good, as in the verse before us.

The word *blameless* means *to be complete, sound, unimpaired, whole, healthful*. It was used to describe animals that were without blemish and therefore acceptable for sacrifice. It follows, then, that the word does not denote moral perfection. It denotes God's standard for man's attainment. Who is this blameless man? The second half of verse 1 describes him.

The fully happy man is one *who walk(s) in the law of the LORD*. The word *walk* is an active participle, underscoring continuous action. Walking is a metaphor for conduct, and running is a metaphor for service in both the Old and New Testament. The noun *law* is a Hebrew word most have heard. It is *torah* and means *instruction*.

Verse 2 repeats the reference to the fully happy man. The verb translated *keep* has a broader meaning than the English translation conveys. It conveys the idea of keeping in the sense of protection, of guarding. It is used of a watchman of a city.

The word *testimonies* is another synonym for the Scriptures. It means *to affirm something as true*. It is used of the Ten Commandments. The word of God asserts spiritual and moral absolutes.

The words *observe His testimonies* are in a construct relationship; that is, they are closely tied together. We could translate “protectors of His (God’s) absolute truths,” or “truth-protectors.”

The verb *seek* means *to resort to, to consult with*. It is used of careful inquiry and investigation.

Verse 3 is a capstone and begins with a word that is not included in our English translation. It is a conjunction that is used to add something. It could be rendered *also* or *furthermore*.

The psalmist makes a negative statement, “do no unrighteousness,” and then a positive one, “they walk in His ways.” The positive interprets the negative. Scripture recognizes the principle of relative righteousness that does not mean sinlessness. Philippians 3:12 and 15 illustrate the principle well. In Philippians 3:12 Paul disclaims that he has *already become perfect* (mature); whereas in 3:15 he addresses *as many as are perfect* (mature). Maturity was both claimed and disclaimed.

THE DUTY OF THE HAPPY MAN 119:4

“*Thou hast ordained Thy precepts, that we should keep them diligently.*”

The first half of the verse shows the duty of man as commanded by God. The word *precepts* means *to charge with duty*. The verb *ordained* means *to lay down, establish*. The second half of the verse reveals the imperative on man. The words *keep diligently* are literally *to keep very much*, a reference to full obedience.

THE DESIRE OF THE HAPPY MAN 119:5

“*Oh that my ways may be established to keep Thy statutes!*”

This verse begins with a burst of intense emotion. *O that* is an interjection—an exclamation point word.

He desires to be this man, but something stands in his way. And what is this roadblock? It is lack of resolution in obeying the Lord. The word *established* means *to be fixed, firm, stable*. The psalmist clearly sees his obligation to obedience; but at the same time, he is keenly aware of his weakness.

The word *statutes* in the verb form means *to cut in, to inscribe* and then *to prescribe* something. He sees God’s word as “cut in stone,” to use an English idiom.

THE DESTINATION OF THE HAPPY MAN 119:6-8

“Then I shall not be ashamed when I look upon all Thy commandments. ⁷I shall give thanks to Thee with uprightness of heart, when I learn Thy righteous judgments. ⁸I shall keep Thy statutes; do not forsake me utterly!”

Anticipated Soon 119:6

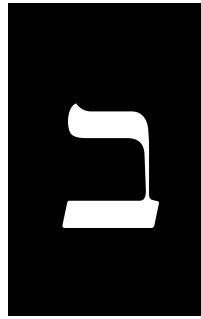
The word *then* is an adverb that may point to temporal or logical sequence. Both fit the context very well. This shows the anticipation of the young man. The verb *look upon* is a hiphil, or causative, stem. He is looking to God to bring him to obedience—to cause him to obey.

The embarrassment and shame that come from doing the wrong thing can be avoided by giving heed to God’s word.

Anticipated Later 119:7-8

When I learn could also be translated *as I learn*. His thanks would increase as he learns more—praise would keep pace with progress. Capacity for praise is increased as we learn more of the word of God.

What do the words *forsake me not utterly* mean? The answer lies in observing that the word *utterly* is identical to the word *diligently* at the end of verse 4. If the Lord expects full obedience (verse 4) and the psalmist fails to provide it, does it not follow that he might expect full wrath for failure (verse 5)? *Do not forsake me utterly!* is a prayer that God would deal with him in grace.



Beth

“Resolution to Obey God’s Word”

Psalm 119:9-16

THEME

Resolution and determination are revealed by four verbs in verses 15 and 16: “I will *meditate ...regard ...shall delight ...and I shall not forget.*” In identifying the theme of these lines, one should compare them with the preceding Aleph lines.

The Aleph verses (1-8) and the Beth verses (9-16) are closely related. Throughout the psalm, each of the eight line alphabetic divisions is self-contained. At the same time, progression, similarity, and contrast are often apparent. Here spiritual progression is evident.

THE IMPERSONAL BECOMES PERSONAL

In the Aleph lines, the condition of the happy and obedient man is *impersonally* contemplated; in the Beth lines, the condition of the happy and obedient man is *personally* experienced.

In verse 1 the young man speaks of *those* who obey the word, but in verse 10 he changes to the first person personal pronoun *I*. What he admired in others, he now experiences himself.

PRAYER BECOMES PRACTICE

In the Aleph lines, the desire to *obtain* right priorities is expressed (119:5); in the Beth lines, the desire to *maintain* right priorities is expressed (119:10).

PROMISE BECOMES FULFILLMENT

In the Aleph lines, there is a *promise* to proclaim the Lord’s name (119:7); in the Beth lines, there is a *practice* of proclaiming the Lord’s name (119:13).

DESIRE TO BEGIN LEARNING BECOMES DESIRE TO CONTINUE LEARNING

The psalm is clearly autobiographical and personal. Was Psalm 119 written all at one time? Or is it a kind of spiritual diary written over a longer period of time?

It is as though the writer is showing us excerpts from his spiritual diary. If this is true, each eight line section is like a movement in a symphony containing variations of a major theme.

SHORT OUTLINE

- A. The Young Man's Conclusion 119:9
- B. The Young Man's Resolution 119:10-16

COMMENTARY

THE YOUNG MAN'S CONCLUSION 119:9

"How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Thy word."

How is a compound word in Hebrew made up of an interrogative meaning *what* and a preposition meaning *by*. Placed in combination, they mean *by what means*. The focus is on the word of God as the means to a lifestyle that is clean and pure.

Can we determine anything about the age of a "young man"? This same Hebrew word was used of Moses at 3 months (Exodus 2:6 translated *boy*). It is also used of Joseph at age 17 (Genesis 37:2 translated *youth*). The young man of Psalm 119 is perhaps the same age as *my son* in Proverbs 1:8, 2:1, 3:1, etc. Age is a relative matter, but Paul did speak of Timothy's *youthfulness* in I Timothy 4:12. At this time he was probably in his forties.

While the psalm focuses on a *young man*, this is not to be taken exclusively, as though the word of God were not adequate for older men, younger women, or older women. Perhaps the reason for addressing young men is because they were the future leaders of the nation, and their character determined that of the nation.

The verb *keep pure* means *to be clean* or *to make clean*. If a young man's way is clean, the word of God can keep it that way; if his way is not clean, the word of God can make it clean. While sexual purity is included, it is not the primary meaning of this word. In Psalm 73:13 the word *pure* is used in a general sense to describe one's walk with God. In Proverbs 20:9 the word is used in a context of honesty in business. The word found here in Psalm 119:9 is an intensive stem—God's word can keep one "sparkling clean."

The word *way* may refer to anything from a highway to a crooked road. It is used figuratively of one's lifestyle. It is kept pure by *keeping* it in harmony with the word of God. This verb has a fairly wide range of meaning.

- It refers to the activity of a gardener in Genesis 2:15 (translated *keep*). God put Adam in the garden "to cultivate and *keep* it."
- It refers to the activity of a shepherd in Genesis 30:31 (translated *keep*). Jacob speaks to Laban and says, "I will pasture and *keep* it."
- It refers to the activity of a watchman of a city in Isaiah 21:11 (translated *watchman*).
- It refers to the activity of hearing and obeying God's word in Isaiah 42:20 (translated *observe*).

Psalm 119 informs us of our duty to the word of God. We are to obey its dictates, guard it from attack, and care for it as we would a garden or a flock of sheep.

The word is found in some form in Psalm 119:4, 5, 8, 9, 17, 34, 44, 55, 57, 60, 63, 67, 88, 101, 106, 134, 136, 146, 158, 167, 168. In each case, it is translated by some form of the English word *keep*.

THE YOUNG MAN'S RESOLUTION 119:10-16

His Committal 119:10

"With all my heart I have sought Thee; do not let me wander from Thy commandments."

Wholeheartedness is a theme found in 119:2, 10, 34, 58, 69, and 145. The expression occurs in only two other places in the book of Psalms and always represents total dedication. Putting them together, we learn—

- Praise is to be whole hearted (Psalm 9:1, 111:1).
- Pursuit of the Lord is to be whole hearted (Psalm 119:2, 10, 58).
- Persistence in the word is to be whole hearted (Psalm 119:34, 69).
- Prayer is to be whole hearted (Psalm 119:58, 145).

Seeking God is inseparably connected to seeking His word. How does one seek God? One seeks God by going to the Scriptures. God's person and God's word cannot be separated; to honor one is to honor the other. The sincerity of the psalmist's search for God is demonstrated by hiding the word of God in his heart (119:11).

The last half of verse 10 shows the psalmist is determined but not overconfident. He recognizes the need for divine help to keep him on the right path. "I pledge my best efforts—my whole heart—but it is God's grace that will keep me true."

His Quest 119:11

| *"Thy word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against Thee."*

Normal word order is subject-verb-object. Here the words *in my heart* are placed first, giving them special emphasis. The focus is on where the word of God must be in order to be effective.

The word *treasured* means *to stockpile and to accumulate by great effort*. In Proverbs 10:14 it is used metaphorically of wise men accumulating knowledge. This activity is so important that Job regards it more important than eating (Job 23:12). To hide the word in one's heart is to have it continually present in one's thinking. Our word *memorize* expresses the idea very well.

The word *that* is a combination of words used to express intent. The psalmist is introducing the practical and moral purpose of knowing the word of God. The intent of the word of God stored up in one's mind is to prevent sin. Every pastor is in the business of preventive medicine—assuming he teaches the word. The old saying, “Sin will keep you from the word, or the word will keep you from sin,” is true.

His Worship 119:12-14

“Blessed art Thou, O LORD; teach me Thy statutes. ¹³With my lips I have told of all the ordinances of Thy mouth. ¹⁴I have rejoiced in the way of Thy testimonies, as much as in all riches.”

I Petition the Lord 119:12

The word *Thou* indicates an abrupt move. It is an emphatic personal pronoun. It is an emotional expression of enthusiasm for God coupled with a prayer to be taught. The verb *teach* is an intensive stem. He wishes to be taught thoroughly and well.

I Proclaim the Lord 119:13

The verb *have told* is used primarily of mathematical activity and means *to count*. However, in the intensive form it means *to recount*, taking on the idea of recitation. Psalm 78:1-4 illustrates the meaning of the word perfectly. Its theme is the passing of the word of God from generation to generation. The psalmist says “our fathers have told us...” and we will “tell to the generation to come....” The New English Bible translates the verb *have told* as *I say them over, one by one....*

That the word of God is *of Thy mouth* is a clear statement of his view of Scripture. He regarded it to be a divine revelation spoken in human language. In Deuteronomy 18:18 God says of the prophet that He will send to Israel, “... I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.”

The psalmist is not only committed to hiding the word in his own heart, but he proclaims it to others as well. He has publicly proclaimed the word to which he is privately devoted. His light is not hidden under a bushel.

I Praise the Lord 119:14

The word *as* implies equality. It implies that his joy in the word is *equal* to his joy over riches. This is not what the Hebrew text says, and the NASB has noted this fact in the margin. Literally, he says he rejoices in the word “as over all” riches. The word of God means more than riches—it is the treasure above all treasures.

His Promise 119:15-16

“I will meditate on Thy precepts, and regard Thy ways. ¹⁶I shall delight in Thy statutes; I shall not forget Thy word.”

The verbs *meditate*, *regard*, and *delight* could all be taken as present tenses, meaning *I do meditate*, etc. To *forget* can bear the sense of *to neglect*.

The psalmist repeatedly tells of his joy and delight in the word of God (119:14, 16, 24, 47, 70). It is the word of God that brings him happiness. It is deemed superior to all else.

The word *ways* may be translated *paths*. The word of God tells us where to walk and in what direction we should go. Obeying the word of God keeps us on the right path.

SUMMARY OF IDEAS IN PSALM 119:9-16

- The Power of the Word 119:9
- The Priority of the Word 119:10
- The Memory of the Word 119:11
- The Understanding of the Word 119:12
- The Declaration of the Word 119:13
- The Honor of the Word 119:14-16

NOTES



Gimel

*“Honoring the Word of God in
a Hostile World”*

Psalm 119:17-24

THEME

The opposition sits and slanders the psalmist, but he keeps his mind focused on the word of God (119:23). This ability to focus in the midst of the most severe affliction is found throughout the entire psalm. Watch for it.

SHORT OUTLINE

- A. His Opening Prayer 119:17-19
- B. His Passionate Desire 119:20
- C. His Faithful Persistence 119:21-24

COMMENTARY

HIS OPENING PRAYER 119:17-19

Prayer that is Positive in Nature 119:17-18

Prayer for God's Bounty 119:17

“Deal bountifully with Thy servant, that I may live and keep Thy word.”

How did the psalmist know he could ask God to be bountiful? How could he be sure God would even entertain such a request? The answer is not far removed. He could make such a request because of historical precedent. God was known for dealing bountifully with men (Psalm 13:6, 116:7). Since God had been bountiful in the past, the psalmist could expect Him to do the same in the present.

For the first time in this psalm, the writer gives himself a descriptive title—“Thy servant.” Not only is this the first title he gives

himself, it is the only title he gives himself. It is used in 119:17, 49, 65, 76, 84, 91, 122, 124, 125, 135, and 140. Why does he use this title exclusively? This is his only title because the chief characteristic of a servant is obedience to orders. Since Psalm 119 is all about the word of God, the sole issue for the believer is obedience to it.

Reference to being made alive is found in 119:17, 37, 40, 50, 88, 107, 149, 154, 156, and 159. In each case it is translated *revive me*. The NASB marginal note translates *preserve me alive* in 119:50 and *keep me alive* in 119:107. The expression *that I may live* occurs four times in this psalm and describes life at its fullest. An examination of each reveals—

- The full life depends upon the abundance of God (Psalm 119:17).
- The full life depends upon the grace of God (Psalm 119:77).
- The full life depends upon the truth from God (Psalm 119:116).
- The full life depends upon the wisdom from God (Psalm 119:144).

Prayer for Insight 119:18

“Open my eyes, that I may behold wonderful things from Thy law.”

The verb *open* is an intensive form. It means open my eyes widely—20/20 vision please! The petition assumes that human insight is not sufficient to perceive truth clearly. The term *that I may behold* is a causative stem. He desires that God will cause him to see *wonderful things* from the word of God. *Wonderful things* do not merely refer to things that amaze, but to things that are extraordinary. It contains things that cannot be discovered by human reason (I Corinthians 2).

Prayer that is Negative in Nature 119:19

“I am a stranger in the earth; do not hide Thy commandments from me.”

The word *stranger* refers to people with no inheritance rights—transients. The believer’s pilgrim state calls upon him to attach himself to that which is eternal.

What does it mean for God’s commandments to be hidden? The context supplies the answer. It means hidden to one’s understanding. The psalmist is asking for enlightenment.

HIS PASSIONATE DESIRE 119:20

“My soul is crushed with longing after Thine ordinances at all times.”

The word *longing* is found three times in the Old Testament, and all are here in Psalm 119:20, 40, and 174. What does it mean to have a crushed soul? In English idiom, being crushed refers to disappointment. This is not the idea in the Hebrew expression. It refers to intense longing. The consistency of the longing is expressed by the words *at all times*.

HIS FAITHFUL PERSISTENCE 119:21-24**In Resisting Human Viewpoint 119:21-23**

“Thou dost rebuke the arrogant, the cursed, who wander from Thy commandments. ²²Take away reproach and contempt from me, for I observe Thy testimonies. ²³Even though princes sit and talk against me, Thy servant meditates on Thy statutes.”

Of the Arrogant 119:21-22

The *arrogant* are described by two participles, “ones being cursed” and “ones wandering.” Their destiny is described by the word *cursed*, and their conduct is described by the word *wandering*. Arrogant ones are referred to in 119:21, 51, 69, 78, 85, and 122.

The verb *take away* is literally *to roll away*. This pictures the psalmist under a great burden that needs to be removed. He needs a load taken off his shoulders.

The word *reproach* means *taunt* and is used in Nehemiah 4:4 of the taunts directed toward the Israelites who were trying to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. This might mean this psalm was written during post-exilic times.

The reproach and contempt spoken of here is not divine discipline but persecution from those who detest God’s truth. We live in Satan’s cosmos, and to assert the truth of God’s word is to insure that one will be ridiculed in a thousand different ways. He was being taunted because he was *observe(ing) Thy testimonies*. He could have caused the affliction to go away if he had stopped asserting God’s truth. However, he did not choose to put comfort above principle. Holding to God’s word is never comfortable and easy.

Of the Critics 119:23

Princes refers to officials, rulers, leaders, and dignitaries of all sorts. The word *sit* denotes an official gathering. The psalmist’s proclamation of God’s word was so forceful that his opponents found it necessary to call a formal session to discuss him!

In Embracing Divine Viewpoint 119:24

“Thy testimonies are also my delight; they are my counselors.”

While this slanderous talk was going on, what did God’s servant do? He occupied himself with God’s word—he ignored the opposition. They were not even allowed a place in his thoughts. The verb *meditate* denotes total occupation. I Kings 18:27 illustrates its meaning. Elijah had challenged the prophets of Baal to a contest to see whose God would listen to their prayers. When their god did not respond to their prayers, Elijah taunted them saying, “...either he (their god) is occupied (our word *meditate*) or otherwise unavailable.”

God's word is the psalmist's *delight*. This word is used five times in Psalm 119. In each case it serves as a buffer against pressure and affliction. See it in 119:24, 77, 92, 143, and 174.

Over against the princes gathered in counsel against him stands his "staff of advisors" called *my counselors*, or literally "the men of my counsel."



Daleth

*“Affliction Brings the Potential
of Deeper Insight”*

Psalm 119:25-32

THEME

Psalm 119:25a introduces the presence of pressure—his *soul cleaves to the dust*. But the psalmist does not attempt to hide this fact from God. In 119:26 and 28, he tells the LORD about his problem. In the midst of all of this, he focuses on the word of God and grows (119:27b, 30, 32)

SHORT OUTLINE

- A. The Petitions of the Young Man 119:25-29
- B. The Choices of the Young Man 119:30-32

COMMENTARY

THE PETITIONS OF THE YOUNG MAN 119:25-29

Revive Me 119:25

“My soul cleaves to the dust; revive me according to Thy word.”

The verb *cleaves* means *to keep very close*. Job 19:20 uses it to describe the relationship of bone and flesh, saying, “My bone clings to my skin and my flesh.” The word is also used in Genesis 2:24 to express the marriage relationship of Adam and Eve. He is to *cleave* to Eve, his wife.

The psalmist feels “married” to the dust. He is overwhelmed with a sense of weakness and frailty. He is truly mortal. But though he is feeling low, he is not incapacitated, for he can pray and write skillfully.

The verb *revive* is imperative mood, meaning this is a prayer. It is an intensive stem, meaning he is asking for the fullest life possible. Only one kind of life is acceptable, however, that is life *according to Thy word*. The phrase means according to the teaching, the instruction, the requirements, the provisions, and the promises of the word of God.

Teach Me 119:26

“I have told of my ways, and Thou hast answered me; teach me Thy statutes.”

My ways refers to one’s general lifestyle. It should be taken in a more specific sense in this verse, however. It refers to his life in the condition described in 119:25. The verb *told* means *to number, to recount, to recite*. The psalmist recites his feelings of being “earth-bound” to God.

Enlighten Me 119:27

“Make me to understand the way of Thy precepts, so I will meditate on Thy wonders.”

This petition is not merely a repetition of the request to be taught. Understanding focuses on the transformation of information into wisdom for living. The verb is a causative—cause me to understand.

Strengthen Me 119:28

“My soul weeps because of grief; strengthen me according to Thy word.”

His soul is heavy, and he needs the load lifted. The verb *weeps* is literally *drops* and means *to be weary*. It is also used in contexts where something is wasting away.

Give Me 119:29

“Remove the false way from me, and graciously grant me Thy law.”

The psalmist does not say *remove me from the false way*, but rather *remove the false way from me*. He is speaking of the error that is present in every mind that is untouched and uninfluenced by the word of God. Paul teaches the same concept in II Corinthians 10:5 where he speaks of “destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.”

Removal of error is not the same as possession of truth. For this reason, the second half of the verse is a request for truth. He sees himself as undeserving of truth and therefore requests that it be granted on a grace basis.

THE VOLITION OF THE YOUNG MAN 119:30-32

*"I have chosen the faithful way; I have placed Thine ordinances before me.
³¹I cleave to Thy testimonies; O LORD, do not put me to shame! ³²I shall
run the way of Thy commandments, for Thou wilt enlarge my heart."*

I Choose 119:30a

While it is true that only God can open our eyes to truth (119:26, 27, 29), this does not invalidate the importance of our decisions to pursue truth. It is wrong to ask the Lord to teach us and then sit back and wait. Divine supply of truth does not contradict the pursuit of truth. Desire is kindled *in* the pursuit of God's word, not *before* the pursuit of it.

I Place 119:30b

Once again volition is at the forefront. The psalmist has made right choices. No matter what the issue may be, the psalmist always makes the choice to focus on God's word.

I Cleave 119:31

Not all problems have been solved; victory is not complete, but his mental attitude is right.

I Run 119:32

The verb *run* is vigorous. His pursuit of the word of God is not half-hearted or apathetic. His obedience is energetic and enthusiastic.

The verb *enlarge* means *to be or to make large*. He is speaking of enlarged understanding of the Lord's word. This establishes a request made frequently in this psalm.

NOTES



He

“Prayer for Understanding God’s Word”

Psalm 119:33-40

THEME

The abundance of petitions makes the theme obvious. Verses 33 and 34 form the basis from which the other petitions flow. Understanding the word of God is fundamental to all of the believer’s functions in life. The psalmist, knowing this to be true, also recognizes that God’s truth cannot be understood by the unaided human mind. He must be taught by God, and these lines petition the Lord to do just that.

SHORT OUTLINE

- A. Prayer for Teaching 119:33
- B. Prayer for Understanding 119:34
- C. Prayer for Obedience 119:35
- D. Prayer for Priorities 119:36
- E. Prayer for Perspective 119:37
- F. Prayer for Fulfillment 119:38
- G. Prayer for Delivery 119:39
- H. Prayer for Fullness 119:40

COMMENTARY

PRAYER FOR TEACHING 119:33

“Teach me, O LORD, the way of Thy statutes, and I shall observe it to the end.”

The verb *teach* is interesting. It may mean *to throw arrows*, *to send rain*, and *to provide teaching*. The thread of meaning that goes through all three ideas is that of strong control on the part of the sender—to throw arrows where one wants them to go, to send rain where one wants it to fall, and to provide teaching where one wishes it to exist. He is saying, “O LORD, cause teaching to be cast in my direction.” The words *to the end* spell out permanent commitment.

PRAYER FOR UNDERSTANDING 119:34

“Give me understanding, that I may observe Thy law, and keep it with all my heart.”

Petition for understanding is a repeated theme found in verses 34, 73, 125, 130, 144, and 169. The end of understanding is not merely knowledge but obedience. Understanding is not just an intellectual matter. In the Old Testament, no one is wise who is not also good. True wisdom always shows up in good moral character.

PRAYER FOR OBEDIENCE 119:35

“Make me walk in the path of Thy commandments, for I delight in it.”

Obedience is a delight, not a burden. Psalm 119:67 will tell us how God brought him to the place of obedience: “Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Thy word.” Affliction was the blessing that issued from a faithful God because it drove the psalmist to the word.

God as the cause of all growth is strongly emphasized in these lines. The first seven lines begin with a causative verb. This is the *hiphil* stem in Hebrew and denotes cause. These petitions will come about only as God causes them to do so.

PRAYER FOR PRIORITIES 119:36

“Incline my heart to Thy testimonies, and not to dishonest gain.”

The verb *incline* means *to stretch out* or *bend*. The psalmist recognizes that his natural propensities are not toward the word of God. Divine help is needed to bend his mind and emotions toward the truth. He is speaking of priorities. A priority is a list of things in order of importance. Most believers have a correct view of priorities theoretically; that is, we know what the important things *should* be. However, we should always examine ourselves for practical priorities—things as they actually *are* in our lives.

There are two things the psalmist wants removed from his life. The first is *dishonest gain*. The Hebrew word means *to cut off*. It was a technical term used by weavers for cutting off a piece of cloth from the loom. In the Old Testament a moral tone was given to it. It referred to cutting off what was not one’s own. Our English idiom “rip off” is a similar idea. Thus, NASB translates *dishonest gain* or,

better yet, *selfish gain*. Desire for financial gain is regarded as an inferior value when it becomes the object of man's pursuit. The highest value is the pursuit of knowledge of the word of God.

PRAYER FOR PERSPECTIVE 119:37

"Turn away my eyes from looking at vanity, and revive me in Thy ways."

Vanity is a second inferior value. The word means *worthless thing* and connotes that which is hollow and trivial. He petitions God to turn his eyes away from such trivialities and focus them on the word. It is, after all, only the Lord who can dim the luster of this world.

PRAYER FOR FULFILLMENT 119:38

"Establish Thy word to Thy servant, as that which produces reverence for Thee."

The word *establish* carries the sense of *fulfill*. This verse is a good example of the motivation behind prayers in the Old Testament. Believers petitioned God to act in order to vindicate His own character. Here the idea is "Fulfill your word to me, so people will have great respect for you." He is saying, "When you fulfill your word, you gain respect." He is concerned for the reputation of God.

PRAYER FOR DELIVERY 119:39

"Turn away my reproach which I dread, for Thine ordinances are good."

What is his reproach? Some suggest he is referring to the discipline of God upon him. However, there is no evidence that the writer of this psalm is under divine discipline. It is better to understand the reproach to be that which he is suffering for honoring God's word in a hostile world.

PRAYER FOR FULLNESS 119:40

"Behold, I long for Thy precepts; revive me through Thy righteousness."

He passionately desires that his longing for God's word will be rewarded by God's gracious life-giving response.

NOTES



Vav

“God’s Grace Explained by God’s Word”

Psalm 119:41-48

THEME

The key to these lines lies in the word *lovingkindness* (119:41). It is a term that expresses the idea of faithfulness to a relationship, such as friend to friend, brother to brother, sister to sister, and husband to wife. It is the Old Testament word that comes closest to the New Testament word *grace*. It speaks of a relationship established by free choice. Ruth 2:11-12 speaks of Ruth’s act in leaving her kindred in order to be with Naomi. In Ruth 3:10 that freewill act is called a *kindness*, the same word as *lovingkindness* in Psalm 119:41. The translation *unfailing grace* expresses its meaning well. And where do we learn of this unfailing grace? We learn of it in the word of God.

SHORT OUTLINE

- A. The Root of God’s Blessing 119:41
- B. The Fruit of God’s Blessing 119:42-48
 - 1. A Witness 119:42-44, 46
 - 2. A Freedom 119:45
 - 3. A Love 119:46-48

COMMENTARY

THE ROOT OF GOD’S BLESSING 119:41

“May Thy lovingkindnesses also come to me, O LORD, Thy salvation according to Thy word...”

There verb *come* carries great meaning with it. It describes three highly significant events.

- It is used of the LORD coming to His people.
In Exodus 19:9 the LORD comes saying, “Behold, I shall come to you in a thick cloud, in order that the people may hear when I speak with you, and may also believe in you forever.” This coming of the LORD to Mt. Sinai is expressed poetically in Deuteronomy 32:2-3.
- It is used of the fulfillment of God’s promises.
In Joshua’s farewell address, he reminds the nation that “not one word of all the good words which the Lord your God spoke concerning you has failed; all have been fulfilled (lit. come) for you, not one of them has failed (Joshua 23:14).”
- It is used of the predicted arrival of the Messiah.
Genesis 49:10 speaks of the time when “Shiloh comes.”
- It is used of the coming of the Lord in judgment or salvation (Psalm 50:3 and 118:26).
Now the psalmist desires the coming of God’s *unfailing graces* (note the plural). The noun *word* is probably better translated *promise*.

THE FRUIT OF GOD’S BLESSING 119:42-48

A Witness 119:42-44, 46

“So I shall have an answer for him who reproaches me, for I trust in Thy word. ⁴³And do not take the word of truth utterly out of my mouth, for I wait for Thine ordinances. ⁴⁴So I will keep Thy law continually, forever and ever... ⁴⁶I will also speak of Thy testimonies before kings, and shall not be ashamed.”

The order is important: Experience of God’s grace (verse 41a) and trust in God’s word (verse 41b) are prerequisites to facing the world with an effective witness.

An important concept concerning the believer’s witness is present here. Having an answer is linked to trust in the word of God. True witnessing is not the sharing of a personal experience—true witnessing is the communication of the word of God. Sharing is subjective; witnessing is objective. Sharing flows from the heart of man; witnessing flows from the heart of God.

Scripture is called *the word of truth*. The noun *word* and the noun *truth* stand in a construction relationship. This is designed to fuse two words into one idea. It means God’s word is inseparably linked to truth, and final truth is found in God’s word. The noun *word* is coupled with the LORD over 240 times in the Old Testament.

The verb *I trust* is used of a hope that exists no matter what happens. It was used by Job when he said, “Though He slay me, I will hope in Him (Job 13:15).”

The petition that God's word will not be taken from his mouth means, "Don't deny me the privilege of a witness." The reference to kings does not mean he has spoken before them. It does mean that if and when that time arises, he will not be intimidated. This verse has achieved fame because many writers have used it to describe Martin Luther's courageous stand at the Diet of Worms.

A Freedom 119:45

"And I will walk at liberty, for I seek Thy precepts."

Truth frees! Jesus also said this in John 8:32, " '...and you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.' " The word of God gives us capacity for living.

The word *liberty* means *to be wide, broad, spacious, and measureless*. It is a word for expansion and growth. In what does this liberty consist? Context provides the answer. He wishes to be unrestrained in his witness. He will not allow himself to be constrained or intimidated. The verb *seek* means *to seek out very carefully and diligently*.

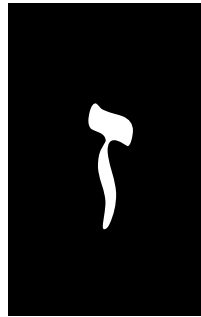
A Love 119:47-48

"And I shall delight in Thy commandments, which I love. ⁴⁸And I shall lift up my hands to Thy commandments, which I love; and I will meditate on Thy statutes."

The earthly prestige and position of the one to whom we witness should have no bearing on our delivery of the message.

The more we become acquainted with the word, the deeper our affection for it becomes. Lifting up the hands or stretching forth the arms pictures that which one wishes to hold and embrace. The idea of fervent longing, desire is also conveyed by these gestures. As such, they are frequently seen in prayer contexts (Psalm 28:2, 63:4, 141:2).

NOTES



Zayin

*“The Sustaining Power of
God’s Word”*

Psalm 119:49-56

THEME

Verses 50, 52, and 54 establish the theme of these eight lines. The Scriptures are the psalmist’s comfort; they fill his memory and are his songs. Only one petition is found in these lines (119:49). After this opening petition, the lines become a personal testimony to the sustaining power of God’s word. These lines are strongly autobiographical.

SHORT OUTLINE

- A. The Prayer 119:49
- B. The Opposition 119:50-51
- C. The Response 119:52-53
- D. The Victory 119:54-55
- E. The Summary 119:56

COMMENTARY

THE PRAYER 119:49

“Remember the word to Thy servant, in which Thou hast made me hope.”

Remember is a very important word in the Old Testament. Over twenty men are named Zechariah, which means *the Lord remembers*. There are two kinds of memory in the Old Testament. The first may be called reflective memory, as in Deuteronomy 5:15. Here God tells Israel, “You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt....” Simple recall is the idea. Sometimes, however, there is what may be called reactive memory. Exodus 2:23-25 is an example. Israel cries out to God in her Egyptian bondage, and we

are told “God remembered His covenant....” This means God responded to His covenant with an action of deliverance. Reactive memory is the type in Psalm 119:49. The psalmist is saying, “Remember and act—remember and do something.”

God took action to cause the psalmist to be thrust on the word of God (119:49b). The rest of the lines show how God did this for him. This rests upon a principle: It is characteristic of God to create circumstances in the lives of His children that drive them to His word.

THE OPPOSITION 119:50-51

“This is my comfort in my affliction, that Thy word has revived me. ⁵¹The arrogant utterly deride me, yet I do not turn aside from Thy law.”

God drove the psalmist to His word through affliction. The verb means *to inflict pain upon* and was regarded as a sign of God’s faithfulness (119:75).

The word *comfort* is a colorful word. Its basic meaning is *to breathe deeply*. It was used of a physical display of pain or of relief. The meaning is conveyed when we say, “I breathed a sigh of relief.” The word of God brought relief to the young man. That God routinely comforts his children is an axiom of the Old Testament, as may be seen in Isaiah 40:1; Psalm 23:4, 71:21, and 86:17.

The word *revived* may be found in several contexts. It may mean—

- To recover from discouragement, as in Genesis 45:27.
- To recover from physical pain, as in Joshua 5:8 and Judges 15:19.

The arrogant *deride* him, a word that means *to make fun of*.

THE RESPONSE 119:52-53

“I have remembered Thine ordinances from of old, O LORD and comfort myself. ⁵³Burning indignation has seized me because of the wicked, who forsake Thy law.”

With Regard to Himself 119:52

The young man operated on the basis of previously learned truth. Affliction often leaves no time to go to the word and learn its truth. Affliction demands immediate response; therefore, if the word is not in one’s memory through previous learning, it is too late to learn it.

The order was preparation—affliction—response. It was not affliction—preparation—response. The psalmist held an absolute view of truth. That which sustained him was *of old*. With reference to truth, newer is not better.

With Regard to His Enemies 119:53

The words *burning indignation* translate a word that means *burning heat*, a metaphor for intense anger. In the psalms, the believer often identifies with God in a protective manner. It is a “you hate the Lord and I hate you for hating Him” kind of thinking. Intense anger toward those who reject and ridicule God’s word is a great virtue. It is interesting to note that the psalmist is more provoked at the apostasy of men from God than at the trouble they bring to him.

THE VICTORY 119:54-55

“Thy statutes are my songs in the house of my pilgrimage. O LORD, I remember Thy name in the night, and keep Thy law.”

The ridicule never reached the writer where he lived. It never obscured the song that he had in his heart. God’s word was like a pleasant melody as he passed through the vicissitudes of life. As full of affliction as life may be, God’s word can make the suffering sing, even in the night!

The words *house of my pilgrimage* refer to the course of his earthly life. The songs were sung during his earthly life and take on a “here and now” tone. Remembering God’s name in the night means it is forever on his mind.

THE SUMMARY 119:56

“This has become mine, that I observe Thy precepts.”

This has become mine may be translated *this has been my practice*. The last half of verse 56 describes his life in summary form.

NOTES



Heth

“Devotion to God’s Person, God’s Word, and God’s People”

Psalm 119:57-64

THEME

The key statement is found in verse 57—“The LORD is my portion....” These words represent the high-water mark of Psalm 119. The psalmist is saying, “God is everything!” All the rest of the words add support to this confession; they are bits of evidence that prove his assertion to be true. Lest his words should be understood as a claim to full maturity, the prayer of the last line is appropriate—“teach me Thy statutes.”

SHORT OUTLINE

- A. Devotion: Professed with Words 119:57
- B. Devotion: Expressed by Conduct 119:58-64a
- C. Devotion: Anticipated in Prayer 119:64b

COMMENTARY

DEVOTION: PROFESSED WITH WORDS 119:57

“The LORD is my portion; I have promised to keep Thy words.”

This opening sentence has no verb. Sentences of this type emphasize an enduring condition. It is therefore descriptive of the writer’s entire life. The juxtaposition of *LORD* and *my portion* convey the idea of intimacy and personal relationship. It is a familiar expression of trust and devotion found throughout Psalms in places such as Psalm 16:5, 73:26, 119:57, and 142:5.

The word *portion* is pregnant with meaning. It means *land share* and was used of the inheritance given to the various tribes of Israel. Every tribe had a share of the land except the priests. Their portion

was the Lord Himself (Numbers 18:20, Deuteronomy 10:9). For the Lord to be one's portion was descriptive of one's temporal and eternal relationship to God (Psalm 73:26). To be occupied with God's word is to be occupied with Him (Psalm 119:57).

It is possible that these words show the writer was a priest. If so, this shows the passion for the word of God that must be present in those who teach it. Psalm 119 reveals the heart of the ideal pastor.

DEVOTION: EXPRESSED BY CONDUCT 119:58-64A

In Prayer 119:58

"I entreated Thy favor with all my heart; be gracious to me according to Thy word."

The first half of this verse stresses the sincerity of his prayer; the second half, the basis of his prayer.

The verb *entreated* is an intensive stem, indicating urgent and passionate petition. The word *favor* is literally *face*. This was an idiom for asking God's favor. He is saying, "Look at me with approval and blessing."

The prayer *be gracious to me* occurs nineteen times in the book of Psalms. It is a prayer uttered in the midst of—

- Loneliness (Psalm 25:16)
- Distress (Psalm 31:9)
- Sin (Psalm 51:1)

The verb *gracious* is found in over fifty Old Testament names and is found in names such as Hannah, giving us Anna, Ann, Nancy, Anita, and Annette. It is also found in the name Johanan and gives us John, Hans (German), Juan (Spanish), and Ivan (Russian).

According to your word tells why the prayer is justified, how it is delineated and motivated.

In Choices 119:59

"I considered my ways, and turned my feet to Thy testimonies."

The word translated *considered* refers to use of the mind to think. It referred to thinking in the sense of planning (Genesis 50:20 translated *meant*). It also referred to making a judgment (Isaiah 53:4 translated *esteemed*). It was also used for meditation (Malachi 3:16 translated *gave attention*). Every believer should practice self criticism using the word of God as the standard of judgment. The psalmist made two choices: He chose to deliberate, and he chose to change.

In Obedience 119:60

"I hastened and did not delay to keep Thy commandments."

The verb *hastened* is one whose sound expresses its meaning. In English, “pop” pops, “sizzle” sizzles, and “boom” booms. *Hastened* is one of those kinds of words. It sounds like this: Chushhhhhhhh. The word conveys the idea of speed because of the rush of air expelled when it is pronounced. It is found frequently in the prayers of the psalms (Psalm 22:19; 40:13; 70:1, 5; 71:12; 141:1).

In Faithfulness 119:61

“The cords of the wicked have encircled me, but I have not forgotten Thy law.”

Cords of the wicked is best interpreted by 119:110 where the cords are described as a trap. In a broad sense, *cords* is a metaphor for the reign of terror of the wicked. The psalmist maintained a cool head and remained focused on the word of God. The hostility did not disturb his concentration.

In Praise 119:62

“At midnight I shall rise to give thanks to Thee, because of Thy righteous ordinances.”

Midnight does not mean twelve o’clock. It referred to the very middle of the night—its darkest hour, the time when one would be expected to be sound asleep.

In Companions 119:63

“I am a companion of all those who fear Thee, and of those who keep Thy precepts.”

Here is a criteria for the selection of friends. He was a friend to those who had respect for God and who were solicitous of God’s word.

DEVOTION: ANTICIPATED IN PRAYER 119:64

“The earth is full of Thy lovingkindness, O LORD teach me Thy statutes.”

The first half of the verse describes our rich resources in God; the second half recognizes our need to tap into them.

NOTES



Teth

*“The Goodness of God Drives Us
to His Word Through Affliction”*

Psalm 119:65-72

THEME

Before God in His goodness had afflicted him, he had gone astray (119:67-68). He now concludes that it was good to be afflicted because it drove him to the word of God (119:71). The goodness of God is mentioned five times in these eight lines. It is translated *well* in verse 65; *good* in verses 66, 68, and 71; and *better* in verse 72.

SHORT OUTLINE

- A. The Lesson of God’s Goodness Learned 119:65-66
- B. The Lesson of God’s Goodness Taught 119:67-72

COMMENTARY

THE LESSON OF GOD’S GOODNESS LEARNED 119:65-66

*“Thou hast dealt well with Thy servant, O LORD according to Thy word.
⁶⁶Teach me good discernment and knowledge, for I believe in Thy com-
mandments.”*

Both goodness and affliction are mentioned repeatedly in these lines. These two ideas have a definite connection with one another. Affliction is truly a blessing of God because it drives us to the word of God, and nothing is better than this.

The psalmist reviews his life and sees in all things that have befallen him the good hand of God. This is the perspective of maturity. Ability to see the hand of God in every event in one’s life is the consistent viewpoint of the mature Christian.

The word *well* may convey several ideas. It may mean good in the sense of God's management of life events that make them beneficial to us. We might call this the "Romans 8:28 sense." Good may also stand as the antithesis of evil (Psalm 34:14). It may also refer to what one considers to be the highest good (Ecclesiastes 8:15). *Good* is the first word of 119:65, 66, 68, 71, and 72.

The expression *according to Thy word* means according to the *teaching* of the word. The treatment he had been accorded by God was just like the word of God had taught him to anticipate. The word of God never creates false expectations. We should always measure our expectations by God's word. Is what I expect biblical? Is it truly something the word says I may expect?

The word *discernment* may be translated *taste*. It is used in Exodus 16:31 of the manna provided by God; its "taste was like wafers with honey."

THE LESSON OF GOD'S GOODNESS TAUGHT 119:67-72

The Results of the Affliction 119:67-68

"Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Thy word. ⁶⁸Thou art good and doest good; teach me Thy statutes."

Verse 67 asserts the goodness of God in the past, and verse 68 proclaims His goodness in the present. God is good "behind me" (119:67) and "before me" (119:68).

The opening line hinges on a "before-after" contrast. Before God brought affliction his way, he *went astray*. The Hebrew participle describes the daily straying and wandering of his walk. The word *afflicted* literally means *to bend over*. It was used to describe what the Egyptians did to the Israelites in causing them to persist in hard labor. "So they appointed taskmasters over them to *afflict (bend over)* them with hard labor (Exodus 1:11)." Our English idiom "brought him to his knees" captures the idea.

The affliction had good results because it brought the psalmist to obedience. This assumes, of course, that his attitude toward the affliction was proper. Hebrews 12:5, 11, and 15 tell of the benefits discipline can bring to us and warn of the possibility of a *root of bitterness* that a wrong attitude can bring.

The word *doest good* describes what God does for those who are in a close relationship to Him. The word pervades the book of Deuteronomy and is usually in contexts that say, "Be careful to obey the word 'that it may go well with you.'" See Deuteronomy 4:40; 5:16, 29; 6:3, 18; 12:25, 28; 22:7.

The Nature of the Affliction 119:69-70

“The arrogant have forged a lie against me; with all my heart I will observe Thy precepts. ⁷⁰Their heart is covered with fat, but I delight in Thy law.”

A lie has been *forged*. The verb is colorful and paints a graphic picture. It means *to glue, to plaster over, to smear*. A “smear campaign” had been lodged against the psalmist. However, the psalmist did not try to correct, utter complaint, or rebuke the liars. In the midst of it all, he reaffirmed his loyalty to the word of God. When sinned against, the believer needs to reaffirm his loyalty to God’s word; he does not need to attack the one who sinned against him.

The personal pronoun *I* found in verses 69 and 70 is emphatic. The psalmist wishes to draw strong contrast between the wrong done to him and his reaction to it. They are lying about me, but *I* concentrate on obeying God’s word; they have joy in material things, but *I* delight in God’s word.

The *fat* heart is a reference to the stuffing of oneself with material things to the exclusion of spiritual possessions (Psalm 73:3-7). It is also used of insensibility in Psalm 17:10 (see NASB marginal note).

The Conclusion about the Affliction 119:71-72

“It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Thy statutes. ⁷²The law of Thy mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces.”

These last two verses begin with the words *Good for me*. Affliction has driven him to the word of God! This is blessing of the highest order; this is ultimate good—worth more than any material possession one could own!

The psalmist often expresses his love for the word of God by means of comparison to other things.

- He loves the word more than riches (119:14).
- He loves the word more than the sweetness of honey (119:103).
- He loves the word more than an earthly inheritance (119:57, 111).
- He loves the word more than gold (119:127).
- He loves the word more than great spoil (119:162).

NOTES



Yodh

“Growth Under Pressure Encourages Others Who Observe”

Psalm 119:73-80

THEME

The psalmist desires that those who have respect for God will observe his faithfulness to God's word in affliction and will rejoice (119:74) and be helped (119:79). The psalmist desires to be an example of loyalty to God's word no matter what.

SHORT OUTLINE

- A. The Theme Introduced 119:73-74
- B. The Confession Proclaimed 119:75
- C. The Petitions Made 119:76-80
Each of these five verses contains a petition.

COMMENTARY

THE THEME INTRODUCED 119:73-74

The Work of God for Me 119:73

“Thy hands made me and fashioned me; give me understanding, that I may learn Thy commandments.”

His Work for Me in the Physical Realm 119:73a

The psalmist believed in a Creator-God. He did not view man as the end of a long evolutionary process. Recognition of a personal God who is apart from and above creation is a major feature of the Bible. Every writer assumes this to be true.

His Work for Me in the Spiritual Realm 119:73b

If God has provided our physical makeup, is it not logical that he would also provide for our spiritual needs? God as creator implies God as teacher. The psalmist is saying “You have made me, I now petition you to instruct me.”

The Work of God through Me 119:74

“May those who fear Thee see me and be glad, because I wait for Thy word.”

Who are those who *fear Thee*? The word consistently means *to revere and respect* and is often translated this way. It is used—

- Of the attitude of children toward their parents.

In Leviticus 19:3 God commands, “ ‘Every one of you shall *revere* his mother and his father....’ ”

- Of the attitude one was to maintain toward the Tabernacle.

In Leviticus 26:2 God once again commands, “ ‘You shall keep My sabbaths and *revere* My sanctuary....’ ”

- Of the attitude man is to have toward God (Psalm 119:74).

The fear of the Lord manifested itself in certain kinds of conduct. Not cursing a deaf man and not placing a stumblingblock in the path of a blind man was to *revere* God (Leviticus 19:14). Not wronging one another was called *fearing* God (Leviticus 25:17). To obey God’s word was to *fear* God (Deuteronomy 17:19).

When those who fear God see the stability of the psalmist when in affliction, they will be strengthened. It is interesting to note that we may influence others for good by nothing more than our attitude toward the word of God.

The word *glad* has a wide range of meanings in the Old Testament. It expressed what wine could do to a person, what perfume could do, what a wise son does for his father, and what a kind word brings. Its most common use is to express the joy derived from God and His salvation (Psalm 5:11, 9:2, 32:11, and 40:16).

This is what the psalmist hopes to do for those who observe him. We can have an effect on another believer’s emotional stability by our relationship to the word of God. Attitude toward truth has impact!

THE CONFESSION PROCLAIMED 119:75

“I know, O LORD, that Thy judgments are righteous, and that in faithfulness Thou has afflicted me.”

Confession about God's Word 119:75a

The word *righteous* denotes conformity to an absolute ethical or moral standard. God Himself is the standard by which absolute values are determined. Psalm 145:17 states this saying, "The LORD is righteous in all His ways, and kind in all His deeds." The basic meaning of righteousness is *not deviating from a standard*.

It is only in the school of affliction that man learns to rightly evaluate the worth of God's word and comes to know its power.

Affliction is sweetened when we understand its salutary design.

Confession about God's Character 119:75b

The basic meaning of the word *faithfulness* is found in its first usage in Exodus 17:12. Israel was in battle against the Amalekites, and we are told that Aaron and Hur held up Moses' hands and "Thus his hands were *steady* until the sun set." To be faithful is to be steady. God is the only constant—all else is fleeting and changing. This leaves little doubt where our confidence should lie. The works of God are faithful (Psalm 33:4), and the words of God are likewise (Psalm 119:86).

THE PETITIONS MADE 119:76-80**Those Revolving about God 119:76-77**

"O may Thy lovingkindness comfort me, according to Thy word to Thy servant. ⁷⁷May Thy compassion come to me that I may live, for Thy law is my delight."

His Faithful Love 119:76

Comfort refers to a special application of God's faithful love. The psalmist looks at what God promises in His word and then pursues it in prayer.

His Deep Love 119:77

Notice the identity of God's person and God's word. To honor one is to honor the other.

The word *compassion* is consistently used of very deep love, usually of a superior to an inferior. It is often rooted in some kind of natural bond, such as father-child relationship. Psalm 103:13 says, "Just as a father has *compassion* on his children, so the LORD has *compassion* on those who fear Him." When used of God's love for man, it is freely and unconditionally bestowed. Exodus 33:19 says, the LORD "will show *compassion* on whom I (He) will show *compassion*."

Those Revolving about Man 119:78-80***The Arrogant 119:78***

“May the arrogant be ashamed, for they subvert me with a lie; but I shall meditate on Thy precepts.”

The word *lie* looks back to verse 69 where the same word is used. In each case, the word means *without cause*. The psalmist is being slandered. In verse 69 he focused on the word when slandered; in verse 78 he focuses on prayer. There is a duologue: God speaks to us in His word; we speak back to Him in prayer.

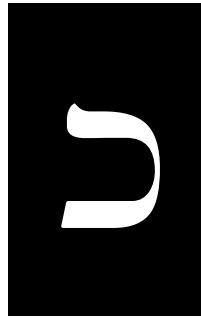
The Reverent 119:79

“May those who fear Thee turn to me, even those who know Thy testimonies.”

Himself 119:80

“May my heart be blameless in Thy statutes, that I may not be ashamed.”

The embarrassment that comes from ignorance of God’s word can be avoided if we will only consult it diligently.



Kaph

*“Trusting God in the Most
Trying Hours of Life”*

Psalm 119:81-88

THEME

The enemies of the psalmist are more prominent in these lines than anywhere else in Psalm 119. His situation is truly life-threatening (119:87 *They almost destroyed me on earth...*). He is in a “when will God come through” state of mind (119:82, 84). Though he is not questioning *whether* God will come through, he is certainly wondering *when* God will come through.

SHORT OUTLINE

- A. His Question Asked 119:81-82
- B. His Case Argued 119:83-88

COMMENTARY

HIS QUESTION ASKED 119:81-82

“My soul languishes for Thy salvation; I wait for Thy word. ⁸²My eyes fail with longing for Thy word, while I say, ‘When wilt Thou comfort me?’ ”

Verses 81, 82 and 87 each begin with a verb that sets the emotional tone of these lines. The word is lost in our English translation because it is translated *languishes* (81), *fail* (82), and *destroyed* (87).

The verb means *to be finished, to be at the end, to be spent, to be exhausted*. It is translated *died out* in Isaiah 15:6 where the prophet says, “...the tender grass died out...” The writer of Psalm 119 is at the end of himself; his resources have dried up, but he still looks to God for delivery.

This shows the falsity of the idea that a believer must always be bubbling over and never have discouraging days. Paul speaks of being afflicted, but not crushed, of being perplexed, but not despairing (II Corinthians 4:8).

What is meant by reference to the failing eyes? Note that the words *with longing* are italicized. This means they are not part of the original Hebrew text. Literally, the verse reads, “My eyes fail for Thy word....” It seems it would be better to supply *with looking* instead of *with longing*. The meaning would be “I have looked and looked and looked and looked until I am ‘looked out.’ ” He is saying “My eyes have failed, looking for your delivery to come about.”

HIS CASE ARGUED 119:83-88

Deliver Me Because I Am Lonely and Forgotten 119:83

“Though I have become like a wineskin in the smoke, I do not forget Thy statutes.”

What is meant by the metaphor *a wineskin in the smoke*? The wine-skin was the Old Testament equivalent of a bottle. They were often hung from the rafters of a room for storage. If they remained there for any length of time, they became shriveled and browned by smoke. As such, they represented forgotten objects. This is the way the psalmist feels. The metaphor suggests he perceives himself as useless, unattractive, and forgotten. And yet, though forgotten, he is not forgetful—he keeps focused on the word of God.

Deliver Me Because My Life is Short 119:84

“How many are the days of Thy servant? When wilt Thou execute judgment on those who persecute me?”

He is reminding God of the brevity of his life. He is saying, “The days of my life will allow me to wait only so long.” The shortness of life means the time needed to display God’s judgment is very brief.

It is characteristic of the psalms for the destruction of the ungodly to be desired. This fact requires no apology but does require explanation. See the study on “Wrath” at the back of this commentary.

Deliver Me Because I am an Innocent Victim 119:85-87

“The arrogant have dug pits for me, men who are not in accord with Thy law. ⁸⁶All Thy commandments are faithful; they have persecuted me with a lie; help me! ⁸⁷They almost destroyed me on earth, but as for me, I did not forsake Thy precepts.”

The psalmist is especially disturbed by those who make accusations that have no basis in fact—lies! Reference to these lies is

found in 119:29 (translated *false*), 69 (*lie*), 78 (*lie*), 86 (*lie*), 104 (*false*), 118 (*useless*), 128 (*false*), and 163 (*falsehood*).

He has raised the question of the timeliness of God's delivery. It seems that it is truly time for God to act against the ungodly, but He has not yet done so. Having said this, one might conclude that he is questioning the faithfulness of God to His word. But this is not the case, for *all Thy commandments are faithful*.

NOTES



Lamedh

*“The Permanence and Power of
the Word of God”*

Psalm 119:89-96

THEME

The words *forever* (119:89) and *all generations* (119:90) establish the permanence of God’s word. The word of God has saved the psalmist from perishing (119:92); it has given him life (119:93). The word of God is everlasting and powerful—this is his theme.

Verses 89 and 93 begin with the identical Hebrew word. Literally, each verse begins with the words to *eternity*.

SHORT OUTLINE

- A. The Word of God is Eternal 119:89-91
- B. The Word of God is Personal 119:92-96
Notice the shift to the personal pronouns *my* and *I* beginning in verse 92.

COMMENTARY

THE WORD OF GOD IS ETERNAL 119:89-91

The Fact 119:89-90a

“Forever, O LORD Thy word is settled in heaven. ⁹⁰Thy faithfulness continues throughout all generations...”

Word order in this line is very important. The normal order is verb-subject-object. A change in this order means a change in emphasis. Here it is: “Forever, LORD, your word (then the verb).” The eternity of the word is the point being stressed.

The verb *settled* means *to stand firm*. Since it is a participle, it conveys the idea of continuity and permanency.

What does the expression *in heaven* mean? The word *heaven* is used in two basic ways in the Old Testament. It may refer to the physical heavens—that is, the place of the clouds and stars, etc. It may also refer to the abode of God, as in Deuteronomy 26:15. This is the use of the word in Psalm 119. The word of God is settled in the presence of God. The highest authority has ruled—the Scriptures are eternal and eternally true.

The Evidence 119:90b-91

“Thou didst establish the earth, and it stands. ⁹¹They stand this day according to Thine ordinances. For all things are Thy servants.”

The psalmist asserts two fundamental truths found in the Old Testament concerning God. First, He is always viewed as the Creator-God; second, He is consistently seen as the Sustainer-God. He created all things and He maintains all things. The verb *didst establish* focuses on God as creator, whereas *it stands* focuses on Him as sustainer.

Paul asserts the same truth about Jesus Christ in Colossians 1:16-17. “For by Him all things were created...all things have been created by Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.”

What does it mean for *all things* to be the Lord’s *servants*? Two primary ideas reside here. First, they are His servants because they carry out His bidding. Second, they are His servants because they remain as long as He wills.

THE WORD OF GOD IS PERSONAL 119:92-96

His Testimony 119:92-93

“If Thy law had not been my delight, then I would have perished in my affliction. ⁹³I will never forget Thy precepts, for by them Thou hast revived me.”

What the Word of God Had Done 119:92

The verb *delight* is an intensive plural meaning *extreme delight*. It is used five times in this psalm; and in each case, the word of God is its object (Psalm 119:24, 77, 92, 143, and 174). It exists in every conceivable context, including the most intense persecution. Delight in the word of God was the major constant in the psalmist’s life.

What the Word of God Was Doing 119:93

Since the word of God is eternal and will never pass away, it is appropriate that the believer responds to it by never forgetting it.

His Prayer 119:94

"I am Thine, save me; for I have sought Thy precepts."

Delivery is requested on the basis of relationship. Intimate relationship is expressed by the pronouns *You* and *I* being side-by-side and connected together into one by a marking device called a *makkeph*. The argument for delivery based on personal relationship is buttressed by his relationship to God's word.

His Persistence 119:95

"The wicked wait for me to destroy me; I shall diligently consider Thy testimonies."

The idea of persistence becomes obvious when the two halves of the verse are compared. He refuses to allow himself to be distracted from the word of God. This is an important motif throughout Psalm 119—no matter what the affliction or pressure, he maintains his ability to focus on the Scriptures.

His Experience 119:96

"I have seen a limit to all perfection; Thy commandment is exceeding broad."

This verse should be understood as having two contrasting parts. The first half refers to all excellent things he has seen compared to the word of God. It is *broad* in the sense that its perfections go in all directions. God's word is unlimited in its scope and perfection—nothing else comes near it.

NOTES



Mem

“Intense Enthusiasm for the Word of God”

Psalm 119:97-104

THEME

Though there is no punctuation in the Hebrew, the great emotion and force indicated by the exclamation point is expressed by the very nature of the statements. We would punctuate these statements with the exclamation point.

So far in the psalm, the NASB has used only four exclamation marks outside Psalm 119:97-104. They are found in 119:5, 8, 31 and 145. In each instance, they are placed at the end of a prayer. There are three exclamation points in this section of verses (119:97, 103 twice). None of these are prayers; they are all enthusiastic words of praise for the word of God—thus the theme: Intense enthusiasm for the word of God.

SHORT OUTLINE

- A. Love of God’s Word 119:97
- B. Wisdom of God’s Word 119:98-102
- C. Pleasure of God’s Word 119:103-104

COMMENTARY

LOVE OF GOD’S WORD 119:97

| *“O how I love Thy law! It is my meditation all the day.”*

Statement of His Relationship to the Word 119:97a

| The word *how* is an exclamatory word and introduces the tone of these eight lines. The verb *love* has a wide range of usage. It is used of God’s love for His children and is thus immeasurable. On the

other hand, it may express the love of a glutton for food. It is interesting to note that it is never mentioned as an attitude of children toward their parents. The appropriate words for them are *honor* and *obey*.

The psalmist's love for God's word is a theme that runs throughout the psalm. It is found in 119:47, 97, 119, and 159. These lines begin with an expression of love for God's word and end with an affirmation of hatred for every evil way. True love always coexists with genuine hatred.

Evidence of His Relationship to the Word 119:97b

The verb *meditate* means *to go over in one's mind*. It is interesting to note that in most cases it means *to muse over something with a resulting complaint*. It reveals man's tendency to complain about the circumstances of life. But here the word has a positive meaning of thinking about the word of God with pleasure.

This word is found seven times throughout the psalm. See Psalm 119:15, 23, 27, 48, 78, 97, and 148. His meditation goes on *all the day*. The word of God was part of his daily routine—it is not “in my study” or “at my quiet time” but all day. The simplicity of life in his times contributed greatly to his ability to think on the word. There was no media competing for his time nor billboards to cause him to focus on material things.

WISDOM OF GOD'S WORD 119:98-102

Its Benefits 119:98-100

A Wisdom Superior to His Enemies 119:98

“Thy commandments make me wiser than my enemies, for they are ever mine.”

What is the reason for the presence of enemies? Is it because he has done something wrong, or jealousy, perhaps? It is for none of these reasons. The psalmist has enemies because of a conflict in beliefs. His values and norms are determined by the word of God, and he does not fear to say so. The watershed was the word of God—his enemies hated his scriptural orientation. It is impossible to assert the truth of God's word without having hostile enemies.

The wisdom that made the Old Testament unique was based on a verbal revelation from the one true God. It presented God as personal and holy and unwilling to share His glory with another. The Old Testament revealed God to be personal and practical, not philosophical and abstract.

This superior wisdom was due to his possession of the word of God. Moses told the nation of Israel that possession of God's word would be their wisdom in the presence of the nations they possessed. “So keep and do them, for that is your wisdom and your

understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes and say, “Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people” ’ (Deuteronomy 4:6).”

A Wisdom Superior to His Teachers 119:99

“I have more insight than all my teachers, for Thy testimonies are my meditation.”

The verb *insight* is important. It refers to the ability to think through a complex array of thoughts and come to a common sense, practical conclusion. The end result of this kind of insight is success. The word is used in Isaiah 52:13 of the work of the Messiah saying, “My servant *will prosper...*” (same as the word *insight* in 119:99).

Who are his *teachers*? It hardly makes sense to think they are those who have taught him the word of God. Is he saying he knows the word of God better than those who teach him the word of God? It seems better to understand his teachers to be those who were merely students of human opinion who did not have the word. The student who knows the Scriptures is wiser than those who know only the literature and language of man.

Is it not arrogant for him to claim insight superior to his teachers? Not at all, and the last half of the verse tells why. He is not claiming innate insight but learned insight. His insight was due to the objective nature of the word of God. Wisdom was not his by birth but by gift from God through His word.

A Wisdom Superior to His Elders 119:100

“I understand more than the aged, because I have observed Thy precepts.”

Wisdom should come with age. But this assumes that many years have been spent in learning and meditating on the word of God. Age should bring wisdom; but, unfortunately, for most, it only brings wrinkles.

Its Test 119:101-102

It Enables One to Shun Evil 119:101

“I have restrained my feet from every evil way, that I may keep Thy word.”

Wisdom is not intellectual but moral. From the perspective of the word of God, no man is intelligent who is not also good. The words of James 3:13 are in complete agreement, asking us, “Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom.”

The word *that* is used to introduce purpose and intent. It means cleansing from sin is a prerequisite to learning the word. James 1:21 says, “Therefore putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of

wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.”

It Enlightens One to the Right Way 119:102

“I have not turned aside from Thine ordinances, for Thou Thyself hast taught me.”

It is not trite to say, “Sin keeps us from the word, or the word keeps us from sin.” His faithfulness to the word has a direct connection to being taught the word.

PLEASURE OF GOD’S WORD 119:103-104

Exclaimed 119:103

“How sweet are Thy words to my taste! Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth!”

Once again, the word *how* is exclamatory. Sweetness is a metaphor for pleasure. The psalmist has a sanctified sweet tooth. What a joy! Eat all the sweets you want!

Explained 119:104

“From Thy precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way.”

Orientation to the word of God produces hatred. He does not say he disagrees with the false way—he says he hates it. No matter what the pressure, the psalmist never lost his ability to focus on the word (119:22, 42, 51, 61, 69, 78, 83, and 87).



Nun

*“A Vow of Fidelity to the Word
Under All Circumstances”*

Psalm 119:105-112

THEME

These lines open with the psalmist saying he has taken an oath of obedience that has been confirmed (119:106). Further emphasis on this truth is made in verse 112 where he tells us the oath will be kept *forever, even to the end*.

This oath had been very costly. He was *exceedingly afflicted* because of it (119:107), and his life was *continually in my (his) hand* (119:109) because *the wicked have laid a snare for me* (119:110).

SHORT OUTLINE

- A. The Benefits Described 119:105
- B. The Oath Made 119:106
- C. The Cost Counted 119:107
- D. The Worship Offered 119:108
- E. The Enemy Considered 119:109-110
- F. The Joy Stated 119:111
- G. The Oath Reaffirmed 119:112

COMMENTARY

THE BENEFITS DESCRIBED 119:105

“Thy word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path.”

The two metaphors are placed in prominent position. “A *lamp* to my feet your word, a *light* to my path,” the psalmist says. The verse contains no verb, making it a nominal sentence—one which underscores a permanent principle.

The lamp and light metaphors presuppose surrounding darkness, a description of the environment in which we all live. Proverbs 6:20-23 uses them as figures of any source of wise and practical guidance. The lamp was used at night when there was no light. This emphasizes the power of the word to guide both day and night.

The reference to the feet is specific; the reference to the path is general. God's word gives us light for each step, and it also gives light for our whole life.

THE OATH MADE 119:106

"I have sworn, and I will confirm it, that I will keep Thy righteous ordinances."

Two verbs express his determination to obey God's word. The first is *I have sworn*, which means *to bind oneself by oath to do something*. The second is *I will keep* that literally means *to stand*. It is used in the context of vows in the Old Testament and means *to be valid* or *to validate*. It is an intensive stem—I solemnly swear before God and the universe.

What is the content of the oath? What is he swearing to do? The answer is found in the verb *I will keep*. The word conveys several ideas. Note these ideas where the same word is discussed in the Beth section.

The psalmist is saying, "I will learn God's word, I will obey God's word, I will protect God's word, I will defend God's word, and I will cherish God's word."

THE COST COUNTED 119:107

"I am exceedingly afflicted; revive me, O LORD, according to Thy word."

The word of God creates issues; it draws lines and therefore divides. Jesus taught this in Matthew 10:34-38. It divides even the closest relationships. " 'Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's enemies will be the members of his household.' " And what if one wavers under such pressures? Then one is not worthy to follow the Lord.

The psalmist is *exceedingly afflicted*. How much does this indicate? How intense is the pressure? The words *revive me* give us our answer. The verb means *keep me alive*, as the NASB marginal note indicates. The affliction was so great he did not think he would live through it.

THE WORSHIP OFFERED 119:108

"O accept the freewill offerings of my mouth, O LORD and teach me Thine ordinances."

In the midst of all of the affliction, the psalmist is making a “freewill offering.” The Old Testament offerings fell into five distinct categories.

- The Burnt Offering (Leviticus 1) 1:3
- The Grain Offering (Leviticus 2) 2:1
- The Peace Offering (Leviticus 3) 3:1
- The Sin Offering (Leviticus 4) 4:3
- The Guilt Offering (Leviticus 5) 5:6

The peace offering, however, had three subdivisions of offerings. They are found in Leviticus 7:11, which says, “Now this is the law of the sacrifice of peace offerings which shall be presented to the LORD.” Each of the three is then listed:

- The peace-thank offering was for expected blessings (Lev. 7:12).
- The peace-vow offering was for deliverance in response to a vow (“votive” Lev. 7:16).
- The peace-freewill offering was for any overflow of gratefulness (Lev. 7:16).

The peace-freewill offering was made when one could not contain himself. There was no need for a sin or guilt offering—it was the offering of one in intimate fellowship with God.

The Hebrew word translated *freewill offering* in almost every case is used for the voluntary contributions made toward the building of the Tabernacle or the Temple. In Exodus 36:1-7, it is used where the people had to be asked to cease giving since their gifts were far more than what was needed. In an amazing statement we read, “Thus the people were restrained from bringing any more.”

The desire of the psalmist to make such an offering in the midst of extreme affliction is a stupendous illustration of Romans 5:3, “we exult in our tribulations....”

THE ENEMY CONSIDERED 119:109-110

“My life is continually in my hand, yet I do not forget Thy law. ¹¹⁰The wicked have laid a snare for me, yet I have not gone astray from Thy precepts.”

What does it mean for his life (soul) to be in his hand? It means to be in conscious peril for one’s life by choice. Judges 12:3; I Samuel 19:5, 28:21; Job 13:14 are passages that give us information to interpret the expression.

Whether the snare is literal or whether it simply means plans are afoot to bring about his fall is not certain. It is clear that the danger is great and life threatening.

In the midst of this condition, he is unmoved in his devotion to the word of God. No set of circumstances could be so bad as to justify disobedience, nor could the affliction be so great as to modify his priorities. Let happen what will, the word of God must reign supreme.

THE JOY STATED 119:111

"I have inherited Thy testimonies forever, for they are the joy of my heart."

An inheritance was a great thing, something many aspired to obtain in the future. But the psalmist has his—his eternal inheritance is the word of God. When something becomes one's full joy, all risk in the pursuit of it is disregarded.

THE OATH REAFFIRMED 119:112

"I have inclined my heart to perform Thy statutes forever, even to the end."

The psalmist could easily relieve the pressure brought by his enemies if he would but loosen his grip on the word of God, but compromise on that issue is not even a consideration. His glory is the word, and obedience is his crown.



Samekh

*“Prayer for Strength to Keep
His Vow”*

Psalm 119:113-120

THEME

Verses 116-117 should be referenced back to verse 106. The psalmist's vow to loyalty (119:106) is important, but he knows that determination alone will not get the job done. For that reason, he petitions the Lord to *sustain* him (119:116) and *uphold* him (119:117).

SHORT OUTLINE

- A. Attitudes Established 119:113
- B. Confidence Expressed 119:114
- C. Detractors Dismissed 119:115
- D. Prayer Offered 119:116-117
- E. History Reviewed 119:118-119
- F. Reverence Affirmed 119:120

COMMENTARY

ATTITUDES ESTABLISHED 119:113

“I hate those who are double-minded, but I love Thy law.”

The psalmist could say “I hate” as well as “I love.” These attitudes are inclusive, not exclusive. They embrace and complement one another. See the study on “Hatred” in the selected themes section of this commentary.

The word *double-minded* is literally *divided*. It may refer to divided opinion or to divided loyalty. It seems the latter fits the context

best. He hates those who do not join him in full devotion to the word of God.

CONFIDENCE EXPRESSED 119:114

“Thou art my hiding place and my shield; I wait for Thy word.”

The verb *art* is absent in the Hebrew, making this a nominal sentence, or a statement of permanent truth.

God as a *hiding place* conveys the idea of safety and protection from assault. It describes the action of the wise man when he sees evil (Proverbs 22:3, 27:12). We are taught that God protects us from the everyday dangers of life, including the conspiracies of the wicked (Psalm 31:20) as well as the plans of the wicked (Psalm 64:2).

The word *shield* is taken from the ancient battlefield. It is a common metaphor in the psalms for God’s defense of His own people (Psalm 7:10; 18:30; 28:7; 33:20; 59:11; 84:9, 11; 115:9, 10, 11; 119:114; and 144:2). The word was first spoken by God to Abraham in Genesis 15:1. The psalmist had the same God that Abraham had.

DETRACTORS DISMISSED 119:115

“Depart from me, evildoers, that I may observe the commandments of my God.”

The verb *depart* often carries the meaning *cease to obstruct*. The evildoers are in some way hindering his concentration on God’s word. For good reason he says, “Get out of my way!”

PRAYER OFFERED 119:116-117

“Sustain me according to Thy word, that I may live; and do not let me be ashamed of my hope. ¹¹⁷Uphold me that I may be safe, that I may have regard for Thy statutes continually.”

What does it mean to be supported *according to Thy word*? It means, Support me as your word has taught me to expect. The word *ashamed* is common in the Old Testament. Its basic meaning refers to falling into disgrace or disappointment through the failure of oneself or one’s object of trust. The embarrassment is usually public. He is saying, “Do not let me be publicly embarrassed.”

The verb *uphold* often incorporates the means of support, such as food and drink. The verb *have regard* literally means *to gaze upon*. The psalmist is mentally focused on the word of God—it is continually before his eyes.

HISTORY REVIEWED 119:118-119

“Thou hast rejected all those who wander from Thy statutes, for their deceitfulness is useless. ¹¹⁹Thou hast removed all the wicked of the earth like dross; therefore I love Thy testimonies.”

The psalmist assumes the historicity of the accounts of God's delivery of Israel and the destruction of her enemies. The word *useless* refers to whatever disappoints or betrays a person, such as an idol. What the enemies of God trusted in for delivery became the source of great disappointment.

The historical account of the victories alluded to here can be found in the books of Joshua, Kings, and Chronicles.

REVERENCE AFFIRMED 119:120

"My flesh trembles for fear of Thee, and I am afraid of Thy judgments."

His awe is expressed in physical terms. The standard Old Testament lexicon gives but one meaning for the verb *trembles*—to *bristle*. His flesh "creeps" when he thinks of the historical acts of God's judgment. The word is used in many "trembling and shaking" contexts.

NOTES



Ayin

“It Is Time for God to Take Action”

Psalm 119:121-128

THEME

The appeal for action toward his enemies is prominent (119:121b, 122b, 126). The appeal is based on the psalmist's servant relationship to God. Notice its triple repetition in 119:122 and 124-125. He is arguing, “I am your servant, so you are responsible to take care of me.”

SHORT OUTLINE

- A. The Presence of Opposition 119:121-123
- B. The Plea for Grace 119:124
- C. The Petition for Delivery 119:125-126
- D. The Proclamation of Identity 119:127-128

COMMENTARY

THE PRESENCE OF OPPOSITION 119:121-123

His Conduct Demands Delivery 119:121

“I have done justice and righteousness; do not leave me to my oppressors.”

In our culture, we think of government in terms of the executive, legislative, and judicial branches. In Israel, all three concepts fell under one word—*justice*. It is used over four hundred times and means *to govern and rule*. Since ruling involves the exercise of authority, it is appropriate to ask, “From where does the right to rule come?”

Authority may come from a human constitution, as in the United States. It may also be derived from a concept of “human rights.” Ultimately, however, the ideal source of authority is God. Government resting in God and His word is seen exclusively in the nation of Israel in the Old Testament. No other nation has ever had a divinely inspired constitution. Government in its perfect form will be realized only upon the return of Jesus Christ to reign on earth.

His Position Demands Delivery 119:122

“*Be surety for Thy servant for good; do not let the arrogant oppress me.*”
The psalmist has an official relationship to God as His servant. *Be surety* is literally *to take a pledge*. He is asking God to guarantee his good and to “co-sign” to make it certain.

His Hope Demands Delivery 119:123

“*My eyes fail with longing for Thy salvation, and for Thy righteous word.*”
The word *fail* means *to be at one’s end, to be exhausted*. It is best to supply *with looking* instead of *with longing*. He knows God is faithful to deliver, but he has waited as long as can.

THE PLEA FOR GRACE 119:124

“*Deal with Thy servant according to Thy lovingkindness, and teach me Thy statutes.*”
The preposition *with* denotes closeness and intimacy. It is found in the word *Immanuel*, meaning *God is with us in an intimate sense*. The words *lovingkindness* and *statutes* stand next to one another and are joined by the connective *and*. “Deal with your servant according to your lovingkindness and statutes.” What God is and what God says are inseparably linked.

THE PETITION FOR DELIVERY 119:125-128

Action toward Himself 119:125

“*I am Thy servant; give me understanding, that I may know Thy testimonies.*”
The psalmist focuses emphatically upon himself by introducing the first person personal pronoun *I*. Throughout this entire psalm, the writer makes one major assumption about himself: He does not innately possess the needed wisdom for life.

Action toward the Enemy 119:126

| “*It is time for the LORD to act, for they have broken Thy law.*”

The psalmist could have said, “It is time to act because they have afflicted *me*.” While this is true, he does not say it. He says, “It is time to act because they have offended *you* (God).” Concern for the character and reputation of God is always at the forefront.

THE PROCLAMATION OF IDENTITY 119:127-128

*“Therefore I love Thy commandments above gold, yes, above fine gold.
128 Therefore I esteem right all Thy precepts concerning everything, I hate every false way.”*

One can almost sense the word *therefore* between *I love* and *I hate*. He loves God’s word so deeply that all that opposes it is hated. The deeper one’s affection for God’s word, the deeper is one’s hatred toward all who refuse it. See the same concept stated, perhaps even more clearly, in 119:104.

NOTES



“The Word of God Is Wonderful”

Psalm 119:129-136

THEME

The first three verses establish the theme by making a general statement, a specific statement, and a conclusion. Psalm 119:129 makes the general statement concerning the word of God: It is wonderful. Psalm 119:130 follows with a specific statement telling why it is wonderful: It gives light and common sense. Psalm 119:131 draws a conclusion: The word of God should be pursued because of these qualities; therefore, he opens his mouth and pants for it.

SHORT OUTLINE

- A. The Psalmist's Testimony 119:129-131
- B. The Psalmist's Prayer 119:132-135
- C. The Psalmist's Burden 119:136

COMMENTARY

THE PSALMIST'S TESTIMONY 119:129-131

The General Statement: The Nature of the Word 119:129

“Thy testimonies are wonderful; therefore my soul observes them.”

The word *wonderful* is a word rich in meaning. In the Old Testament it refers to things unusual and beyond human ability to produce. It is often translated *too difficult* because it pointed to an accomplishment that could be achieved only by God.

Deuteronomy 17:8 is a good illustration. The administrators of justice in Israel were being instructed on how to rule in certain

cases that came before them. Moses realized, however, that some cases would be beyond the ability of the judges to decide. He thus says, “ ‘If any case is too difficult (our word *wonderful* in Psalm 119) for you to decide...,’ ” then a certain action should be taken. Genesis 18:14 also illustrates. Abraham and Sarah are told they will have a son in their old age. This seems so impossible that Sarah laughs. The angel then says, “Is anything too difficult for the LORD?” (Again the word *difficult* is the same as the word *wonderful* in Psalm 119). The birth of a child was beyond human possibility, but God’s actions are *wonderful*—exceeding all human ability.

Our English word *incredible* touches on the meaning. In Daniel 11:36, the arrogant king speaks *monstrous things*. The NASB margin shows the word *monstrous* to be *extraordinary*. He spoke “incredible things.” Because of the effect produced by doing out of the ordinary, beyond-human-power things, amazement and wonder result.

The word *wonder* is used over thirty-five times in the psalms to refer to the incredible works of God performed for Israel. These works were to be publicly recited. They were not the subject of private meditation; but whenever one thought of them, he was obligated to verbalize them in public.

Specific statement: The Word Gives Light and Common Sense 119:130

“*Thy unfolding of Thy words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.*”

Unfolding is literally *opening*. To unfold the word is to explain and expound it. God’s word is viewed as a shut book that is then opened, and as a result, light comes forth.

The noun *simple* means *to be wide, spacious, and open*. It refers to those who are open to all kinds of influence—that is, those who will consider anything. It refers to all who will not narrow their thinking to the confines of God’s word. Our English word *naïve* captures the idea very well. Proverbs 14:15 speaks of the *simple* (translation *naïve*) as one who *believes everything*.

THE PSALMIST’S PRAYER 119:132-135

That God Would Favor Him 119:132

“*Turn to me and be gracious to me, after Thy manner with those who love Thy name.*”

The words *after Thy manner* translate a single word that is used as a designation of God’s word. It is translated *judgments* in 119:7. It emphasizes the *rightness* of God’s word and thus describes His *manner*.

That God Would Direct Him 119:133

“Establish my footsteps in Thy word, and do not let any iniquity have dominion over me.”

The word *footsteps* is literally *beat*, as in *hoofbeat*. The stress is on the small details of life. He is saying, “Establish each and every step I take.” *In Thy word* describes the path on which his feet walk. The path is fraught with danger, however. The danger is called *iniquity*. Does this mean iniquity done *by* him or iniquity done *to* him? Context supports the latter best. Opposition is seen as a potential danger to his obedience. This is indicated by remote context (119:115) and by nearer context (119:134).

That God Would Deliver Him 119:134

“Redeem me from oppression of man, that I may keep Thy precepts.”

Redemption is the action of God taken toward the nation of Israel. Here the psalmist anticipates that God will do for him personally what He had done for Israel nationally. He is probably looking back to the delivery from Egypt and making application of that great delivery to his present and personal condition.

That God Would Instruct Him 119:135

“Make Thy face shine upon Thy servant, and teach me Thy statutes.”

The first half of this line introduces a metaphor, followed by an explanation of it in the second half. *Shine* is literally *let your face become light*. What does it mean for God’s face to become light? It means that God is teaching us His word. The face of God is seen in the word of God.

THE PSALMIST’S BURDEN 119:136

“My eyes shed streams of water, because they do not keep Thy law.”

The psalmist hates unrighteousness and those who deny God’s word, but this does not mean he does not have a burden for their salvation and restoration. Nonetheless, it is important to note that the burden is not *because they are lost*, but rather *because they do not keep Thy law*. The honor and reputation of God is always the center of concern. It is the glory of God, not the glory of man, that is important.

NOTES



Tsadhe

*“The Nature of the Word
Demands Reverence”*

Psalm 119:137-144

THEME

The word is pure (119:140) and true (119:142). Reverence for it is displayed by zeal for it (119:139), by love for it (119:140), and by delight in it (119:143). Antagonism is seen in those who ignore it (119:139).

SHORT OUTLINE

- A. The Attributes of the Word 119:137-138, 140a, 142, 144a
- B. The Responses of the Believer 119:139, 140b-141, 143, 144b

COMMENTARY

THE ATTRIBUTES OF THE WORD

Its Rightness 119:137-138

“Righteous art Thou, O LORD, and upright are Thy judgments. ¹³⁸Thou hast commanded Thy testimonies in righteousness and exceeding faithfulness.”

The rightness of the word is derived from the righteousness of its author. The character of God determines the character of His word. Therefore, trust in the reliability of God’s word is in direct proportion to one’s trust in the LORD Himself. If we believe His word, we are saying, “God is righteous and true.” If we do not believe His word, we are saying, “God is a liar.” Our opinion of God’s revelation is identical to our opinion of Him.

What gives God the right to command? God has the right to command His creatures because He is creator. Psalm 33:6-9 makes this

point in a poetic description of creation in verses 6-8 and concludes in verse 9 saying, “For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast.” God created by command, and He has the right to rule by command.

The words *and exceeding faithfulness* are literally *they are fully trustworthy*. The basic meaning of *faithfulness* is *to be steady*. Deuteronomy 32:4 lists it as one of the attributes of God. It is also used to describe men and women who have been stabilized by the word of God. God is steady; His word is steady, and we are steady when we learn to depend upon it.

Its Purity 119:140a

“Thy word is very pure...”

The word *pure* means *to be thoroughly refined*. It was used of testing metals to obtain the genuine product. Silver is refined to remove all that which is not silver. The metaphor points to authenticity—the word of God is the word of God—nothing less! I Peter 2:2 reminds believers to desire the “pure (unadulterated) milk of the word....”

Its Truthfulness 119:142

“Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and Thy law is truth.”

Once again, we are reminded that the truthfulness of God’s word is rooted in the truthfulness of God Himself. To understand who God is, is to understand what His word is.

Its Eternity 119:144a

“Thy testimonies are righteous forever...”

Knowledge of the word of God has eternal repercussions. It enables the believer to honor God on earth and prepares Him to honor God with worship forever.

THE RESPONSES OF THE BELIEVER

Its Rightness Dictates a Response of Zeal 119:139

“My zeal has consumed me, because my adversaries have forgotten Thy words.”

The verb *consumed* is literally *to put an end to*. The psalmist’s zeal is so intense that it has exhausted him. We might say “drained me” or “worn me out.” His zeal for the word of God has roused the opposition of those who are irritated by it.

Its Purity Dictates a Response of Memory 119:141

"I am small and despised, yet I do not forget Thy precepts."

Why does the psalmist call attention to his insignificance? He does so because it expresses the way the world feels toward one who embraces God's word.

To be thought insignificant by one's peers would create a temptation to lessen one's devotion to the word in order to enhance one's reputation. He has not done this.

Its Truthfulness Dictates a Response of Delight 119:143

"Trouble and anguish have come upon me; yet Thy commandments are my delight."

Embracing the word of God has brought the psalmist trouble and anguish but has not lessened his delight in God's word. Adherence to the word is not an *exemption* from affliction; it is a *guarantee* of affliction.

Its Eternity Dictates a Response of Hunger 119:144b

"...Give me understanding that I may live."

The word of God is of little value to those whose horizons are only earthly and temporal. It is of eternal value only when our values are eternal.

NOTES



Qoph

*“Under Intense Pressure We Must
Turn to the Word and Prayer”*

Psalm 119:145-152

THEME

The presence of intense pressure is seen in two ways. First, it is indicated by the intensity of the call for help. In 119:145 we have *I cried...answer me...*, and in 119:146 *I cried...save me....* Second, it is indicated by the nearness of the enemy (119:150).

The psalmist's occupation with the word and prayer is stressed by pointing out his occupation with it before dawn (119:147) and his anticipation of it in the night (119:148).

SHORT OUTLINE

- A. The Dual Resource: Prayer and the Word 119:145-149
- B. The Dual Presence: God and the Enemy 119:150-152

COMMENTARY

THE DUAL RESOURCE: PRAYER AND THE WORD 119:145-149

Cycle One 119:145

“I cried with all my heart; answer me, O LORD I will observe Thy statutes.”

Focus on Prayer 119:145a

THE REPETITION OF HIS PRAYER This section of lines begins with a petition about a petition—a prayer about a prayer. *I cried* looks back to something for which he had prayed in time past. *Answer me* views that prayer as yet unanswered. Have we ever prayed a

prayer that seemed to be ignored? If so, what should we do about it? Psalm 119:145 gives us our answer. We should pray about it!

THE SINCERITY OF HIS PRAYER *Heart* is the broadest term in the Bible for the totality of man's inner nature.

- Heart may refer to the *emotions*, as in I Samuel 2:1.
- Heart may refer to the *mind*, as in Genesis 6:5
- Heart may refer to the *will*, as in II Chronicles 12:14.

Prayer involves the emotions, the mind, and the will. His intensity in prayer (*with all my heart*) is matched by his intensity in obedience (119:34 and 69).

THE CONTENT OF HIS PRAYER The word *answer* means *to respond*. In contexts of prayer, it means to respond *favorably*. The psalmist has made a petition; and to all appearances, it has not been answered. At least, the young man believes he has not gotten the favorable response he desires, so he asks again.

Focus on the Word 119:145b

The words *I will observe Thy statutes* do not mean the speaker is trying to make a deal with God. He is not saying, "You grant my petition and I promise to reciprocate by obeying your word."

The psalmist knows that he is asking for something that one who keeps God's word may expect. Psalm 25:10 gave him such assurance. "All the paths of the LORD are lovingkindness and truth to those who keep His covenant and His testimonies." The psalmist wants to experience some of the Lord's lovingkindness. He is laying hold of that which God has promised to believers of his type.

Cycle Two 119:146

"I cried to Thee; save me, and I shall keep Thy testimonies."

Focus on Prayer 119:146a

The verb *save* refers to either physical or spiritual salvation (sometimes both). In 119:126 he had told the Lord it was time for him to act. Had the Lord acted? Or is the psalmist saying, "I called upon you to act, when are you going to do so?"

Focus on the Word 119:146b

His concern for the word of God is used as part of his plea for deliverance. In saving the psalmist, God is doing good things for His word.

Cycle Three 119:147-148

"I rise before dawn and cry for help; I wait for Thy words. ⁴⁸My eyes anticipate the night watches, that I may meditate on Thy word."

Focus on Prayer 119:147a

The word *rise* literally means *to be in front of*. The verb *cry* is different from the word *cried* in 119:145—it involves a greater intensity and urgency.

Focus on the Word 119:147-148

Both 119:147 and 148 begin with the same word that means *to be in front of*. Notice how the psalmist's hope is inseparably linked to God's word. The hope was not of his own making; the hope was created by the Scriptures.

Cycle Four 119:149

"Hear my voice according to Thy lovingkindness; revive me, O LORD, according to Thine ordinances."

Focus on Prayer 119:149a

The verb *hear* is consistently used of effective hearing. It means *hear and act*.

Focus on the Word 119:149b

The word has taught him to pray to be infused with divine life.

THE DUAL PRESENCE: GOD AND THE ENEMY 119:150-152**The Nearness of the Enemy 119:150**

"Those who follow after wickedness draw near; they are far from Thy law."

This verse shows the relationship of the enemy to the psalmist in the first half and their relationship to God's word in the second. Each verse begins with the word *near*. *Near* and *far* show contrast. The farther the wicked get from the word of God, the nearer they get to the psalmist in terms of evil plans. Men who are far from the word draw near to persecute the believer who identifies with God's truth.

The word for *wickedness* means *plan*, and in Old Testament usage the plan is always evil.

The Nearness of the Lord 119:151

"Thou art near, O LORD and all Thy commandments are truth."

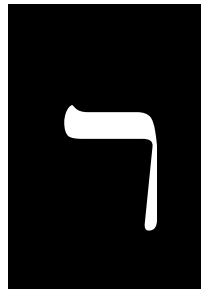
The pronoun *Thou* is emphatic. It shows the psalmist making a definite and dramatic turn in his thinking. He is turning his back on the enemy and is focusing on the LORD alone. The nearness of the LORD is not an abstract thought. The LORD is present because His word is present.

Why does the psalmist refer to the presence of the enemy first and the presence of the LORD second? Perhaps the answer is this: The nearness of the LORD is the final word. It is because the presence of the LORD completely counteracts the presence of the enemy. It is as though he puts the minor problem in front of us first and then introduces the major and final solution last. The presence of the LORD is the final thought he wishes to leave with us.

The Nearness of the Word 119:152

“Of old I have known from Thy testimonies, that Thou hast founded them forever.”

This verse reveals to us how the psalmist developed his doctrine of Scripture. He learned the nature of Scripture *from Scripture*. It was *from Thy testimonies* that he learned that they were eternal in nature. He believed the testimony the word of God gave concerning itself. The doctrine of the nature of Scripture is learned the same way any other doctrine is learned—from the word itself.



Resh

*“Amid Fierce Opposition the Believer
Must Look to God for Life”*

Psalm 119:153-160

THEME

There are five references to affliction and opposition in these lines. He speaks of *affliction* (119:153), *the wicked* (119:155), *persecutors* and *adversaries* (119:157), and *the treacherous* (119:158).

There are three petitions to God saying *revive me*. The verb is better translated *renew my life* and is found in 119:154, 156, and 159.

SHORT OUTLINE

- A. The Prayer 119:153-155
- B. The Abundance 119:156-157
- C. The Attitude 119:158
- D. The Repetition 119:159
The word *consider* in this verse is the same as the word *look* in verse 153.
- E. The Summation 119:160

COMMENTARY

THE PRAYER 119:153-155

Delivery is Appropriate for the Believer 119:153-154

“Look upon my affliction and rescue me, for I do not forget Thy law.
¹⁵⁴Plead my cause and redeem me; revive me according to Thy word.”

The Divine Consideration 119:153

The request does not charge God with indifference; it calls upon God to take notice of his affliction. It means “If you will consider my condition, I believe you will come to my aid.”

The verb *forget* does not mean *lapse of memory*. It rather points to a careless and frivolous attitude toward something.

The Desired Response 119:154

The words *plead* and *cause* are the same Hebrew word. It was used in legal contexts. Perhaps “try my trial” gets the idea across. The word *redeem* was usually found within contexts of God’s action toward the nation of Israel.

The psalmist never hesitated to claim national blessing as a basis for personal blessing. His reasoning was this: God redeemed the nation; I am part of that nation; I may therefore claim national blessing as my own personal blessing. God redeemed the nation, and He also desires to redeem me personally.

This has New Testament application also. In Ephesians 5:25 we are told “...Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her.” Using the same rationale as the psalmist, we may say, “Since he loved the *church* and gave Himself up for *her*, we may also say he loved *me* and gave Himself up for *me*.”

What does it mean to be *revived*? It means to be infused with life. And what does it mean to be infused with life? It means to be able to exercise one’s vital powers to the fullest extent. The psalmist repeatedly asks for the removal of things that he believes will hinder this kind of living.

In the ancient near east religions, there was a never-ending attempt to relate to life by means of nature deities and magical formulas. In Israel, however, one experienced life at its fullest only in obedience to the word of God.

Delivery is Impossible for the Unbeliever 119:155

“Salvation is far from the wicked, for they do not seek Thy statutes.”

The verse opens with a nominal sentence, which means the author is emphasizing a permanent truth—an axiom. But why is salvation always far from the wicked? Is it because they are wicked? Not at all. It is because they reject God’s word. Their salvation is far removed because they are removed from God’s word.

The measure of one’s distance from God is determined by one’s relationship to God’s word. To be near one is to be near the other.

THE ABUNDANCE 119:156-157

“Great are Thy mercies, O LORD; revive me according to Thine ordinances. ¹⁵⁷Many are my persecutors and my adversaries, yet I do not turn aside from Thy testimonies.”

The Abundance of God 119:156

The NASB margin reads *many* for the word *great* in the text. This is because the Hebrew word means both *many* and *great*. When these two ideas are combined, they seem to be well expressed by our word *abundant*.

The word *mercies* is probably the tenderest word in the Old Testament. It is well illustrated by its use in Psalm 103:13, which says, “Just as a father has *compassion* on his children, so the LORD has *compassion* on those who fear Him.” The psalmist is pleading for tender father-like treatment from the LORD.

The Abundance of Persecutors 119:157

The word *persecutors* was used of a man or group of men pursuing another man or group of men for the purpose of taking revenge or making war. It means *to be hounded*. In most contexts it refers to the pursuit of good men by evil men. However, it is used in a good sense in Psalm 23:6 where we read, “Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life....” David was “hounded” by the goodness and grace of God from cradle to grave and then forevermore!

The word *adversaries* is vividly illustrated by its use in Numbers 33:55 where it is translated *trouble*. It says, “ ‘ “But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then it shall come about that those whom you let remain of them will become as pricks in your eyes and as thorns in your sides, and they shall trouble you in the land in which you live.” ’ ”

The word *turn aside* literally means *to bend*. When one is associated with minority opinion, as Christians always are, one is faced with the continual temptation to shift allegiance. In maintaining truth, we are never to bend.

THE ATTITUDE 119:158

“I behold the treacherous and loathe them, because they do not keep Thy word.”

It is important to note that the loathing does not flow from anything personal. He does not loathe them because they afflict him; he loathes them because they loathe God’s word. His attitude toward them flows from his strong identity with the Lord. See the study at the end of this commentary on “Hatred.”

THE REPETITION 119:159

“Consider how I love Thy precepts; revive me, O LORD, according to Thy lovingkindness.”

The verb *consider* is the same as *look* in 119:153. God is personal and desires to be petitioned by His children. His omniscience does not preclude calling His attention to our condition. Here is the third and final request for life.

THE SUMMATION 119:160

“The sum of Thy word is truth, and every one of Thy righteous ordinances is everlasting.”

The word *sum* means *all*, as does *every one*. He says, “All of your word is truth; *all* of your ordinances are eternal.” Here is a comprehensive statement of the psalmist’s view of the totality of Scripture.



Shin

*“The Stabilizing Results of Loving
and Obeying God’s Word”*

Psalm 119:161-168

THEME

The stabilizing effects of God’s word are seen in 119:163 where the word of God had given the psalmist a set of divinely established absolutes. Right was right and wrong was wrong. He hated the wrong and loved the right. Verse 164 shows how the word had established his worship. He had learned to honor the Lord “around the clock.” The words of verse 165 describe stability perfectly—“nothing causes them (him) to stumble.” His love for God’s word is stated three times (119:163, 165, and 167). His obedience is expressed by the verb “do” in 119:166 and “keeps” in 119:167-68.

SHORT OUTLINE

- A. The Presence of Opposition 119:161a
- B. The Presence of Dedication 119:161b-164
- C. The Presence of Results 119:165
- D. The Presence of Testimony 119:166-168

COMMENTARY

THE PRESENCE OF OPPOSITION 119:161A

“Princes persecute me without cause...”

Who were the *princes*? We know they were men of *high position*. The basic idea contained in the word *prince* is official authority. They may have been leaders in civil government or in Israel. We also know they were men of resolute purpose. The key idea in the word *persecute* is *pursuit*, such as in the hunting of animals. When used of men, it always indicates hostile intent. They were also men

of *unjust cause*. Undeserved suffering is the most common type of suffering found in the Psalms. Psalm 35:7 says, “For without cause they hid their net for me; without cause they dug a pit for my soul.” And Psalm 35:19 uses similar words, saying, “Do not let those who are wrongfully my enemies rejoice over me; neither let those who hate me without cause wink maliciously.”

I Peter 4:12-16 is a companion passage from the New Testament. It views two kinds of suffering: inevitable and unjust (4:12-14), and preventable and deserved (4:15-16). Our attitude toward suffering inflicted on us because of our relationship to Christ is to be both expected and joyful. That which comes upon us because of our own wrongdoing is to be avoided.

The persecutors of whom the psalmist speaks were also men of great power and number (Psalm 69:4) who concocted multiple charges (Psalm 109:3)

THE PRESENCE OF DEDICATION 119:161B-164

“*But my heart stands in awe of Thy words.* ¹⁶²*I rejoice at Thy word, as one who finds great spoil.* ¹⁶³*I hate and despise falsehood, but I love Thy law.* ¹⁶⁴*Seven times a day I praise Thee, because of Thy righteous ordinances.*”

He Trembles at God’s Word 119:161b

The verb *stands in awe* is literally *trembles*. In most cases it means *to dread*. It is found in many “trembling and shaking” passages of the Old Testament. Here the word contrasts his attitude toward his persecutors with his attitude toward the word. The psalmist fears God more than he fears man!

He Rejoices in God’s Word 119:162

His joy is expressed by a figure of speech—it is like one who *finds great spoil*. This refers to the custom of plundering an enemy in war and bringing home all his possessions. This would include garments, gold, silver, ornaments, fabrics, women, flocks and herds, slaves, and food and drink.

One can imagine the excitement that came over a town when the victorious general marched through with the booty taken in war now ready for the consumption of the victorious. In verse 161 the psalmist is awestruck and trembles, but verse 162 tells us it was all a pleasant experience.

He Hates What Opposes God’s Word 119:163

He does not say he disagrees or disapproves or dislikes—he says he *hates* falsehood. Hatred for what is false is always made holy by love for what is true—love sanctifies hate. Strong positive attitudes create equally strong negative attitudes.

He Offers Praise Because of God's Word 119:164

Are numbers in Scripture meant to be symbolic? At least two can be easily established: 7 and 666. The number seven consistently conveys the idea of completeness. Creation was completed in seven days. Observances in Israel were on the seventh day, seventh month, seventh year; and Jubilee was seven times seven years.

Likewise Old Testament ritual followed the pattern of seven. There were seven days of unleavened bread, seven days for the feast of Tabernacles, and the seventh year was sabbatical.

Praying seven times a days indicates a full and complete life of praise. Praise is a major doctrine of the Old Testament and is conveyed by at least eight distinct Hebrew verbs. Praise may be defined as the believer's response to the character and works of God—praise of who He is and what He has done.

THE PRESENCE OF RESULTS 119:165

"Those who love Thy law have great peace, and nothing causes them to stumble."

Peace 119:165a

Here is the familiar "Shalom" used in greetings. The most instructive passage on this word is Numbers 6:24-27.

- The one who has peace is blessed.
- The one who has peace is guarded.
- The one who has peace is graced.

Stability 119:165b

When the word of God is one's highest priority, other things become irrelevant.

THE PRESENCE OF WITNESS 119:166-168

"I hope for Thy salvation, O LORD, and do Thy commandments. ¹⁶⁷My soul keeps Thy testimonies, and I love them exceedingly. ¹⁶⁸I keep Thy precepts and Thy testimonies, for all my ways are before Thee."

The great peace that is available is only partially experienced in this life. The burdens and afflictions of life must be left in the hands of the Lord. Meanwhile the issue must be obedience to God's word. This note of obedience continues from 119:116 to the end of the lines.

His claim to obedience is not pride or self-righteousness. These claims are modestly laid before God as evidence of sincerity of purpose; they are not attempts at self-aggrandizement.

The absence of pride is indicated by the words *all my ways are before Thee*. He invites inspection and anticipates that the Lord will know the sincerity of his devotion to Him and His word.

NOTES



Tav

“Petition for Insight and Help”

Psalm 119:169-176

THEME

One counts ten petitions in these lines. This undoubtedly establishes the theme, and this brings Psalm 119 to a fitting conclusion: the psalmist's utter dependence upon God. The spirit of humility that freely admits helplessness apart from God stands as the antithesis of pride.

SHORT OUTLINE

- A. Respond to Me 119:169-172
- B. Reach out to Me 119:173-176

COMMENTARY

RESPOND TO ME 119:169-172

By Hearing Me 119:169-170

“Let my cry come before Thee, O LORD; give me understanding according to Thy word. ¹⁷⁰Let my supplication come before Thee; deliver me according to Thy word.”

The cry for God to hear presupposes that God is under no obligation to hear us. When He does so, as he inevitably does, it is due to His grace, not our merit. We rejoice that His word tells us He delights to respond to His own.

The verb *cry* is one of proclamation— a ringing cry! The word *before* is literally *face*. *Supplication* is derived from the Old Testament word for *grace*. It therefore refers to a prayer for divine grace. The word is used twenty-four times in the Old Testament, of which

twelve are found in Solomon's prayer of dedication of the Temple (I Kings 8-9 and II Chronicles 6). The success of the nation was dependent upon God's grace.

The content of the cry is prayer for understanding. One of the derivatives of the word translated *understanding* is the preposition *between*. It points to the ability to distinguish. In I Kings 3:9 king Solomon prays "So give Thy servant an understanding heart to judge Thy people to discern *between* good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Thine?" Here the word *between* is derived from the word *understanding*. The psalmist is asking for the ability to distinguish between right and wrong, better and best, temporal and eternal.

According to Thy word refers to expectations that are derived from and harmonize with the teaching of the word of God. The content of all valid prayer is the result of biblically defined expectations.

By Enabling Me 119:171-172

"Let my lips utter praise, for Thou dost teach me Thy statutes. ¹⁷²Let my tongue sing of Thy word, for all Thy commandments are righteousness."

The verb *utter* is colorful. It is used of the bubbling up of a spring of water. Thus we could translate "bubble up" or "flow forth." The word *praise* is the word used for the title of Psalms in the Hebrew Bible.

REACH OUT TO ME 119:173-176

By Helping Me 119:173-174

"Let Thy hand be ready to help me, for I have chosen Thy precepts. ¹⁷⁴I long for Thy salvation, O LORD, and Thy law is my delight."

The word *help* is found eighty times in the Old Testament. Outside Psalms it inevitably means *military assistance*. It may be transliterated *ezer*. It is compounded with God's name in *Azariah*, or with the word *stone*, as in *Ebenezer*, or stands alone in the name *Ezra*.

- God is regarded as the only source of true help (Psalm 107:12-13)
- In these final lines of Psalm 119, the source of help is God's hand (119:173) and God's word (119:175).

By Sustaining Me 119:175

"Let my soul live that it may praise Thee, and let Thine ordinances help me."

Rarely, if ever, do the psalms present a petition that is not accompanied by rationale. The psalmist always backs his prayer with reason and argumentation. See the kinds of arguments used in

psalms in the section at the back of this commentary under the heading “The Petition-Rationale Pattern.”

By Shepherding Me 119:176

“I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek Thy servant, for I do not forget Thy commandments.”

If the lost sheep metaphor expresses the psalmist’s inner condition, then the reference is to willful wandering from God. If, on the other hand, the reference is to his external condition, it means the sheep is separated from the flock through no fault of its own. The point would be the dangerous position in which a lost sheep found itself.

The latter seems the best way to interpret these words. The whole context of Psalm 119 has been one of love for the word and obedience to the Lord, not that of a wandering sheep in the sense of rebellion and disobedience.

NOTES

Selected Themes

Psalm 119

FORGETFULNESS

The word *forget* is used 102 times in the Old Testament, of which 33 are found in Psalms. It may have a non-sinful meaning of *simple lapse of memory*, as in Genesis 40:23 where we are told the butler forgot Joseph. Apparently, no evil intent was present in his forgetfulness.

In many cases, however, it identifies a sinful attitude toward God. As we shall see, it is one of the Lord's laments that His own so often forget Him in so many different ways. Here are the ways God may be forgotten.

Failure to Know God is to Forget God.

The expected antonym for *forget* would be *remember*. However, there are passages where the opposite of forgetting is *not knowing*. Hosea 4:6 is such a passage. "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge...since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children."

Failure to Obey the Word is to Forget God.

In Deuteronomy 8:11, Israel is warned, " 'Beware lest you forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments....' " Failure to obey the word of God was one way Israel forgot Him.

Failure to Recall His Works is to Forget God.

Psalm 106:13 says, "They quickly forgot His works; they did not wait for His counsel." In order to help us remember the Lord's works, in particular, the work of the cross, we celebrate the Lord's supper on a regular basis. We are commanded, " 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me' (I Corinthians 11:25)."

Failure to Pursue Only God is to Forget God.

Israel was warned that if they pursued gods other than the true God, it would be regarded as forgetting Him. This is found in Deuteronomy 8:19 which says, “ ‘And it shall come about if you ever forget the LORD your God, and go after other gods and serve them and worship them, I testify against you today that you shall surely perish.’ ” Forgetting God is a serious matter!

Failure to Perceive All Blessings as Flowing from God's Grace is to Forget God.

Deuteronomy 9:6-7 says, “ ‘Know, then, it is not because of your righteousness that the LORD your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stubborn people. Remember, do not forget how you provoked the LORD your God to wrath in the wilderness; from the day that you left the land of Egypt until you arrived at this place, you have been rebellious against the LORD.’ ” All good things have been given to us by God's good grace, and we are never to lose sight of this fact.

To Fear a Human Being is to Forget God.

“ ‘I, even I, am He who comforts you. Who are you that you are afraid of man who dies, and of the son of man who is made like grass; that you have forgotten the LORD your Maker...’ (Isaiah 51:12-13a).”

Satiety is the Major Cause of Forgetting God.

Deuteronomy 8:11-14 warns of this, and Hosea 13:6 states it in the most certain terms, saying, “As they had their pasture, they became satisfied, and being satisfied, their heart became proud; therefore, they forgot Me.”

Our Forgetfulness of God is One of His Laments.

In the most touching manner, the LORD Himself laments, “ ‘Can a virgin forget her ornaments, or, a bride her attire? Yet My people have forgotten Me days without number’ (Jeremiah 2:32).” See also Jeremiah 3:21, 13:25, 18:15, 23:27; Ezekiel 22:12, 23:35.

That the Author of Psalm 119 Never Forgot God is One of its Major Themes.

The author of Psalm 119 repeatedly tells us that no matter what the pressures, he never forgets God and His word (Psalm 119:16, 61, 83, 93, 109, 141, 153, and 176).

HATRED

Love and hate may exist in the same person. The psalmist hates the double-minded but loves the law of God (119:113). The two attitudes are neutral when considered alone. Neither love nor hate are inherently good or evil. Each takes on moral quality when we are able to determine *what* is loved and *what* is hated. The question is never “do I love” or “do I hate?” Love of the world is evil; love of God is good. Hatred of God’s word is sinful, but hatred of sin is a virtue.

Hatred in the word of God may take three different directions: God to man, man to God, and man to man.

Hatred May Flow from God to Man

God Hates All False Religion

False religion may be defined as any that is man-made. Deuteronomy 12:29-31 warns Israel not to inquire into the religions of Canaan. This prohibition is rooted in God’s attitude toward these religions. The LORD speaks of “every abominable act which the LORD hates they have done for their gods....”

God Hates Those Who Practice Evil

Psalm 5:5 says, “The boastful shall not stand before Thine eyes; Thou dost hate all who do iniquity.” Proverbs 6:16 speaks of “six things which the LORD hates....” One should observe that God’s hatred is directed toward both the *act* and the *actor* of sin. Psalm 11:5 and 45:7 also speak of God’s holy hatred.

God Hates Sin in His Own People

This attitude is especially revealed when engaged in religious performance without inner reality. It exists when we do the right thing for the wrong reasons. Isaiah 1:14 and Amos 5:21-27 both present this truth.

Hatred May Flow from Man to God

In Exodus 20:5 God speaks of “those who hate Me.” Men may express this hatred when they “cast my words behind you (them),” as in Psalm 50:17. There are even those who pretend to obey the Lord but in reality are among “those who hate the LORD... (Psalm 81:15).”

Hatred May Flow from Man to Man

Good Men to Evil Men

Good men are those who make the standards of the word of God their own. In Psalm 119:104, 113, 128, and 163, hatred is directed toward that which is contrary to God’s truth. This kind of hatred is

a virtue. Psalm 139:21-22 says, “Do I not hate those who hate Thee, O LORD? And do I not loathe those who rise up against Thee? I hate them with the utmost hatred; they have become my enemies.”

This kind of hatred is more than a virtue, it is an obedient response to the command of God. “Hate evil, you who love the LORD, says Psalm 97:10. Proverbs 8:13 says, “The fear of the LORD is to hate evil.”

Evil Men to Good Men

Even a cursory look at Psalm 119 demonstrates the bitter hatred of men who detest the word of God toward those who love it.

IMPRECATIONS

As noted in the commentary, it is characteristic of the psalms to desire the destruction of the ungodly. Psalm 35:1 says, “Contend, O LORD, with those who contend with me; fight against those who fight against me.” Verse 6 continues, “Let their way be dark and slippery, with the angel of the LORD pursuing them.” While imprecations such as these need no apology for they are truly the words of the Holy Spirit, it seems that an explanation of them is in order. The following observations and comments should help us grasp their significance.

- The psalms are inspired by the Holy Spirit, who has the right to denounce both sin and sinners.
- The writers of Scripture have a deep desire to see justice executed.

In Psalm 28:4, David says, “Requite them according to their work and according to the evil of their practices; requite them according to the deeds of their hands; repay them their recompense.” See a similar statement in Jeremiah 50:15.

- Teaching concerning wrath on evil doers is consistent with the teaching of Jesus (Matthew 18:6, 23:33, and 26:24).
- This also harmonizes with the teaching of the New Testament epistles concerning the wrath of God on unbelievers (II Peter 2:12, 22; II Thessalonians 1:6-9).
- The writers of Scripture identify strongly with the Lord and His cause.
“The boastful shall not stand before Thine eyes; Thou dost hate all who do iniquity,” says Psalm 5:5. In the same psalm in verses 10-11, we read, “Hold them guilty, O God; by their own devices let them fall! In the multitude of their transgressions thrust them out, for they are rebellious against Thee.”

- The psalmist often identifies strongly with the victims of wrongdoing.

Psalm 10:8-10 describes the evil man, saying, “He sits in the lurking places of the villages; in the hiding places he kills the innocent; his eyes stealthily watch for the unfortunate. He lurks in a hiding place as a lion in his lair; he lurks to catch the afflicted; he catches the afflicted when he draws him into his net....”

- In the midst of imprecation and warning, grace is often extended.

Psalm 2:12, after warning of the wrath to come on evil men, says, “Do homage to the Son, lest He become angry, and you perish in the way.”

LIFE

The Hebrew word for life is translated “live” in 119:17, 77, 116, 144, and “revive” in 119:37, 40, 50, 88, 107, 149, 154, 156, 159.

At times, the prayer for life may be physical. In Psalm 119:104, the psalmist speaks of being *exceedingly afflicted*, followed by a request that the Lord revive him. The NASB marginal note has “Keep me alive.” The young man does picture himself on the verge of death in places; and thus, a request for physical delivery is in order.

Physical delivery, however, is not the major idea in his prayer for life. Without exception, there is no living at all unless God grants it. His only hope of living comes from God and His word. Dependency upon God for life is present in every one of the thirteen references to it in this psalm.

Life is viewed as dependent upon God’s bounty (119:17), God’s “never failing graces” (119:88,149,159), God’s compassion (119:77), and God’s gift of understanding (119:144).

In several cases, life is seen as imparted by God’s word (119:50, 107,154, 156). Blessing is seen as coming from God and God’s word, with no distinction made between the two. True life is God-infused life and is therefore a subject for prayer and petition.

THE PETITION-RATIONALE PATTERN

Rarely, if ever, does the psalmist make a petition without attaching some sort of rationale to it. Petitions are backed with argumentation. “Here is *what* I ask, and this is *why* my petition should be granted.” Here are the major petition-reason examples.

The Petition-Praise Argument (Psalm 119:175)

| “Do this so I will be able to praise You,” or “Do this and I promise to praise you when you answer my prayer.”

The Petition-Devotion Argument (Psalm 119:176)

| “Do this because I have met the conditions of devotion which you have set forth in your word.”

The Petition-Choice Argument (Psalm 119:173).

| “Do this because I have chosen the right priorities.” See also Psalm 119:10, 22, 66, and 153 for other examples.

The Petition-Expectation Argument (Psalm 119:170)

| “I ask only those things which your word has taught me to expect.”

The Petition-Merit Argument (Psalm 119:172)

| “Do this so the great merit of Your person and Your word will be exalted.”

The Petition-Opportunity Argument (Psalm 119:171)

| “Do this for me so I will have the opportunity to witness to your faithfulness.”

The Petition-Vindication Argument (Psalm 119:126)

| “Do this so your own character will be vindicated.”