

“Blessed are those...”

אַשְׁרֵי תְּמִיּוּדָרָךְ

A Study on Psalm 119

PART 1



INTRODUCTION

1. Psalm 119 is an acrostic. Each letter of the Hebrew alphabet takes a turn in introducing a verse of the psalm.
2. Psalms are ancient songs written by King David, Moses and others. Psalm 119 does not have an author listed. David could be the author. Whoever it was, he was a young man when he wrote this psalm.
3. The Psalms were written in Hebrew.
4. We continue to use the Psalms in our worship services.
5. Several types of Psalm...
 - A. Psalms of prophecy -- speak of Christ and the Church or what will happen to the Christians. Many contain promises and warnings.
 - B. Psalms of instruction -- Teach what we should do and what we should avoid. They condemn human teachings and praise the Word of God.
 - C. Psalms of comfort -- Strengthen and comfort the Christians in their troubles and sorrows. They also rebuke tyrants.
 - D. Psalms of prayer -- Where we call on God, praying in all kinds of distress. Songs of lament, where we cry out to God.
 - E. Psalms of thanks -- God is praised and glorified for all his blessings and help. God is praised for His works in creating, redeeming and sanctifying us.



Cannot always be classified so precisely and exactly into these groups. Sometimes two, three, or even all five elements are present in a single Psalm. And that is surely true of Psalm 119.



Martin Luther writes this about Psalm 119:

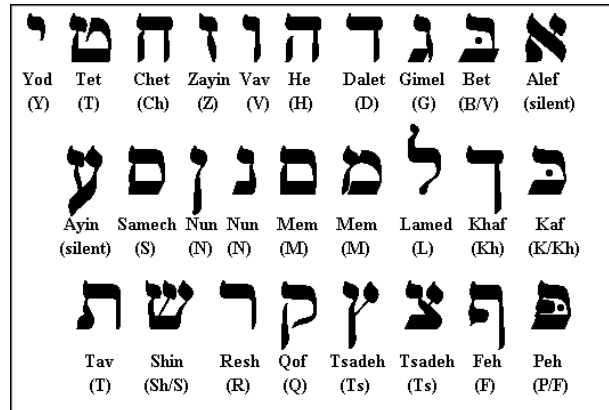
“The 119th Psalm is a long psalm, containing prayers, comforts, instructions, and thanks in great number. It is chiefly written to make us excited about God’s Word. It praises God’s Word throughout and warns us against both the false teachers and against boredom and contempt for the Word. Therefore, it is primarily to be counted among the psalms of comfort. Its primary concern is that we have

God's Word in its purity and hear it gladly. From this concern, then, come powerful prayers, instructions, thanks, prophecies, worship of God, suffering, and all that pleases God and grieves the devil. But where one despises the Word and is satiated by it, there all these cease. For where the Word is not purely taught, there is truly an abundance of prayers, instructions, comforts, worship, suffering and prophecies – but totally false and condemned! For it is then only service to the devil, who is thus impure with all his heretics." (Reading the Psalms with Luther, p. 284)

PSALM 119 IN OVERVIEW

22 "Stanzas" with 8 verses per stanza.

- Aleph – Praises fidelity to the Word of God
- Beth – A young man devotes himself to the Word of God
- Gimel – Prayer for enlightenment in the midst of persecution
- Daleth – Prayer for strengthening in the Word of God
- He – Prayer for preservation
- Waw – Prayer for suitable and joyful confession of the Word of God
- Zayin – God's Word is all his thought and pursuit
- Heth – He holds onto those who fear God
- Teth – He recognizes the salutary effect of his lowliness
- Yodh – He is in need of comfort
- Caph – He sighs, "How long?"
- Lamed – Without the Word of God he would despair.
- Mem – The Word of God is his wisdom in difficult circumstances
- Nun – He promises fidelity to God's Word and endures persecution for it
- Samekh – He abhors and despises those who hate the Word
- Ayin – He is oppressed, but God will not let him be crushed
- Pe – He weeps over the doings of the ungodly
- Tsadhe – Even though he is youthful and despised, he has zeal for the Word
- Qoph – Oh that God would hear his crying, day and night
- Resh – He would be revived quickly
- Sin-Shin – He clings fast to God amid persecution
- Tau – A prayer that God would seek His wayward sheep



THE EIGHT WORDS

The Eight Words used for God's Word in Psalm 119

A. Law (Torah) This is the chief term of all, and is heard most often. The parent verb means "to instruct, to teach." Coming from God the word means both "law" and "revelation." Can mean a single command, or a whole body



of work, i.e. the Pentetuch, or it can mean the entire scripture as a whole.

B. Testimonies (Edoth) Israel is told to place the book of the law beside the ark of the covenant "That it may be there for a witness against you." (Deuteronomy 31:26) The outspokenness of scripture, with its high standards and frank warnings is implied in this word. But also the dependability of God's Word. God's word is a faithful and true witness. This word encourages us to delight in God's testimonies.

C. Precepts (Piqqudim) This word is drawn from the sphere of the office of an overseer, a man who is responsible to look closely into a situation and take action. So the word points to the particular instruction of the Lord, as of one who cares about detail. It is used in Jeremiah 23:2.

D. Statutes (Huqim) This word speaks of the binding force and permanence of the Word of God. That word is "engraved" or "inscribed" "for the time to come as a witness forever." Isaiah 30:8

E. Commandments (Mitzvoth) This word emphasizes the straight authority of what is said, not merely the power to convince or persuade, but the right to give orders.

F. Ordinances (Mishpatim) This word is better known in the Old Testament as "judgements." This is the decision of the all-wise judge about common human situations. This word focuses on the revealed rights and duties appropriate to our situations.

G. Word (Davar) This word is the most general term of all, embracing God's truth in any form, stated, promised, commanded.

H. Promise, saying (word) (Imrah) This word is like the word above, but it also most times carries the idea of promise with it. It is derived from the Hebrew word "to say." (Amar).

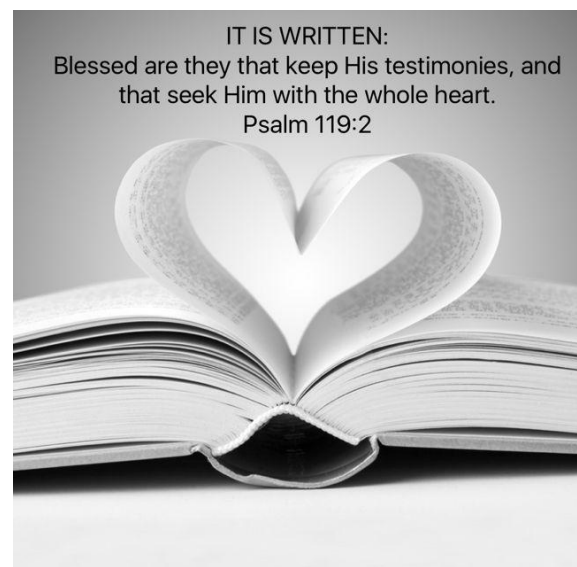
QUALITIES ASCRIBED TO GOD'S WORD IN PSALM 119

Qualities of God's Word

A. Delight -- God's Word brings delight. Not merely the delight of a scholar figuring out the sayings, but also delight in obedience to God's Word.

B. Love -- It is on God's account that we love the writings that reveal Him to us. Loving God is equal to loving His Word.

C. Awesome -- God's Word is awesome. We ought to tremble at the Word of God. It "makes our flesh creep" or it "makes our hair stand on end." It has strength and power.



D. Righteous – God’s word is dependable, unshakable, inexhaustible. You can take the Word of God to the bank.

THE BENEFITS OF SCRIPTURE IN PSALM 119

A. Freedom – Freedom from sin through the forgiveness of sins. Liberty is found in God’s precepts, not in release from them. This is also a mind-stretching encounter with one whose wisdom is greater than our own.

B. Light – A light to walk by, not merely to bask in. Walking in the light means conducting your life according to the Word of God. This word “light” also speaks about the power of the Word to educate a person, to create a discerning mind. “Give me understanding” is the repeated prayer in this psalm.

C. Life – The word revives, it brings life, gives life, spares life, preserves life, and even causes life! The one who sings this song is not a legalist, content with a list of duties, his desire is for God’s renewing, forgiving, life-giving touch through the Word.

D. Stability – God’s Word fills and occupies a potentially distracted mind. This is not escape from the world, but attention to the best advice about the world, God’s Word. This is attention to the main issue, which is the will and promises of God. These impact our real lives. They are more real and relevant than the plots of men. Therefore, hope and comfort are based on a dependable word and promise. “Great peace have those who love your law, nothing can make them stumble.”



THE WORLD OF THE PSALMIST

A. The Psalmist lives as an alien in this world. He knows he does not belong here. He has some who think like he does, but by and large he is persecuted and estranged from the people around him. They even attack him, mock him, make fun of him. He is depressed, he is drained of vitality and “dried up” because of the environment in which he lives.

B. But all of this makes his grip on God’s Word all the stronger. He rises at midnight to praise God. At many times in this Psalm it is impressive to compare the dejection of one line of a couplet with the firmness of the answering line. See verses 81 through 83, for example.

81 My soul longs for your salvation; I hope in your word.

82 My eyes long for your promise; I ask, “When will you comfort me?”

83 For I have become like a wineskin in the smoke, yet I have not forgotten your statutes.

C. There shines a quiet steadfastness of one who has chosen to live by God’s Word. And he still desires to learn more. He prays over and over again: “Give me understanding.” He prays over and over again, “Give me life.” Many see the words of Jesus in this Psalm.