

# PSALM 119 | *The Psalm of the WORD*

Intro: Psalm 119 is the longest chapter of the Bible. And amazingly, that **longest chapter in the Bible is about the Word of God**. It is a Hebrew poem with **176 lines**. And **nearly every one of those 176 lines** are about Scripture. But it is more than a poem. It is crafted as an acrostic poem where there are **22 stanzas** for each of the **22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet**. Each stanza has eight verses and each group begins with a different Hebrew letter.

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What is clear in the poem is that the commands and words of God are central to the Psalmist. In fact, to the Psalmist, it is his way of life: “My life is continually in my hand, Yet I do not forget Your law” (119:109). So, I hope that this study this summer will demonstrate to you the why and how it is that God's word should be the centerpiece of human understanding and experience – especially yours and mine.

Even James reminds us that we are to be both a doer of the word if we are a hearer of the word (1:23). But there is precisely the rub. Are you a HEARER? Do you det yourself up everyday to HEAR the word of God. Should you read a book a day? A chapter a day? A verse a day? You know your capabilities and your time structure. If you start with too much, you will quickly stop. So here is a Psalm that is divided into portions for an evenly balanced meal to make it memorable and digestible.

And as Christians, it is difficult not to see the connection to the person in Psalm 119 to the Word in Christ (John 1). However, the last verse, “I have gone astray like a lost sheep, seek Thy servant, for I do not forget Thy commandments” indicates that the author(s) are clearly human, clearly longing for salvation (174) and while loving and striving to keep “Thy precepts” (140-141), clearly is seeking the ideal in himself in the word. And in the final analysis, only Jesus will realize this. But here, the Psalmist strives after this.

So where do we begin?

## **First, the author is unnamed.**

- Older commentators almost universally say it is a Psalm of David, composed throughout his entire life. Some attribute the psalm to Moses before him. More modern commentators often say that it is post-exilic, coming from the days of Nehemiah or Ezra. If it was ESSENTIAL I am sure that providence would have secured that information. No matter who wrote it, we notice that it was likely written over some period of time and later compiled, **because there is not a definite flow of thought from the beginning of the Psalm to the end**. The sections and verses are not like a chain, where one link is connected to the other, but like a string of pearls were each pearl has equal, but independent value.

## **The psalm is arranged in an acrostic pattern.**

- There are 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet, and this Psalm contains 22 units of 8 verses each. Each of the 22 sections is given to a letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and each line in that section begins with that letter. The closest parallel to this pattern in Scripture is found in Lamentations 3, which is also divided into 22 sections, and there are a few other passages in the Hebrew Scriptures which use an acrostic pattern.

## **The objective of the Psalm.**

- Since this is a Psalm that glorifies God and His Word (“Forever, O LORD, They word is settled in heaven,” 119:89), it refers to Scripture throughout. His word is referred to in almost every verse. The Masorites said that the Word of God is mentioned in every verse except Psalm 119:122. Other people reckon differently (with disagreement about verses 84, 90, 121, and 132). But Scripture is mentioned in at least 171 of 176 verses.

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## The key words in the Psalm.

- In this Psalm there are 8 basic words used to describe the Scriptures, God's written revelation to us:
  - **Law or Torah (Heb.)** (used 25 times): "Its parent verb means 'teach' or 'direct'; therefore coming from God it means both 'law' and 'revelation.' It can be used of a single command or of a whole body of law." (Kidner)
  - **Word** (dabar, used 24 times): The idea is of the spoken word, God's revealed word to man. "Proceeding from his mouth and revealed by him to us." (Poole)
  - **Judgments** (mispatim, used 23 times): "From shaphat, to judge, determine, regulate, order, and discern, because they judge concerning our words and works; show the rules by which they should be regulated; and cause us to discern what is right and wrong, and decide accordingly." (Clarke)
  - **Testimonies** (edut/edot, used 23 times): This word is related to the word for witness. To obey His testimonies "signifies loyalty to the terms of the covenant made between the Lord and Israel." (VanGemenen)
  - **Commandments** (miswah/miswot, used 22 times): "This word emphasizes the straight authority of what is said ... the right to give orders." (Kidner)
  - **Statutes** (huqqim, used 21 times): The noun is derived from the root verb "engrave" or "inscribe"; the idea is of the written word of God and the authority of His written word. "Declaring his authority and power of giving us laws." (Poole)
  - **Precepts** (piqqudim, used 21 times): "This is a word drawn from the sphere of an officer or overseer, and man who is responsible to look closely into a situation and take action. . . . So the word points to the particular instructions of the Lord, as of one who cares about detail." (Kidner)
  - **Word** (imrah, used 19 times): Similar in meaning to dabar, yet a different term. "The 'word' may denote anything God has spoken, commanded, or promised." (VanGemenen)  
(from Warren Wiersbe, BE Bible Study Series).

Some have chastised those who hold up the glory of the Word as if it is "bibliolatry" (i.e. idolatry) and replacing the glory of God for the glory of Scripture. However, this is what this Psalm is about. It diligently explores and declares the light of the Word in the Psalm, but always in connection with God Himself.

- Derek Kidner says, "*This untiring emphasis has led some to accuse the psalmist of worshipping the Word rather than the Lord; but it has been well remarked that every reference here to Scripture, without exception, relates it explicitly to its Author; indeed, every verse from 4 to the end is a prayer for affirmation addressed to Him. This is true piety: a love of God not desiccated by study but refreshed, informed and nourished by it*" (Psalms, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries).
- Charles Spurgeon says, "*This wonderful psalm, from its great length, helps us to wonder at the immensity of Scripture. From its keeping to one subject it helps us to adore the unity of Scripture; for it is but one. Yet, from the many turns it gives to the same thought, it helps you to see the variety of Scripture... Its variety is that of a kaleidoscope: from a few objects a boundless variation is produced. In the kaleidoscope you look once, and there is a strangely beautiful form. You shift the glass a very little, and another shape, equally delicate and beautiful, is before your eyes. So it is here*" (The Complete Works of C.H. Spurgeon, Volume 33).

## The Psalmist's Passion.

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- He had an intense hunger for holiness and a passionate desire to understand God's Word in a deeper way. In all but fourteen verses, he addresses his words to the Lord personally, so this psalm is basically a combination of worship, prayer, praise, and admonition.
- To underline the possibility that Moses or David could have been the writer, he mentioned the opposition of rulers (119:23,161), and he also spoke to kings (46).
- While the psalmist adores God and His word, there is no references to a sanctuary, to sacrifices, or to a priestly ministry.
- He does speak of being a companion to the godly remnant in the land (63) who feel despised (141) and persecuted (84-85, 98, 107, et.al.) and wanted to destroy him (95).

Because of these connections, Warren Weirsbe has suggested the possibility that Jeremiah was the author of the Psalm. We do know it was the prophets who were authors of the histories of Israel (c.f. 1Chronicles 29:29) – so it is not inconceivable that a prophet would extol in the values of the Word in the applied life of the true Israelite.

- To teach the youth (9) who after the Temple's destruction would have had no priestly instruction.
- As one who visited kings, five to be exact (Jer. 1:2) and was surrounded by critics (11:19) who wanted to kill him (18:23) while he faithfully served the Lord (15:15; 20:8).
- Jeremiah wept just as the Psalmist did (28, 136 with Jer. 9:1, 18; 13:17; 14:17; Lam. 1:16; 2:18; 3:48).
- Also, from Weirsbe, the words of the Psalms, in both vocabulary and message, is rooted in the book of Deuteronomy ("second law") which is Moses' second declaration of the law. Jeremiah was a priest as well as a prophet and had a working knowledge of Deuteronomy.

The writer of [Psalm 119](#) *delighted* in God's law (vv. 16, 24, 35, 47, 70, 77, 92; and see 1:1; 19:8, 10). Moses told Israel to love the Lord with all their heart (Deuteronomy 6:5) and that "these words shall be on your heart" (6:6). We should not be satisfied with having the law only in our home, head, or hand; It's not merely for the doing. It is to the in the heart – it is for the living and the loving.

If we delight in His Word, learn it, treasure it within, and obey what it says, the Lord will work in us and through us to accomplish great things for His glory! As you read and study [Psalm 119](#), you will see the writer in a variety of experiences, but his devotion to the Lord and His Word will not change. Circumstances may change, but God and His Word remain the same.

The following lessons will cover two of each of these sections in the following weeks. Here is a simple overview of the sections:

1. Aleph (1-8): Blessed and Blameless.
2. Beth (9-16): Take Time to Be Holy.
3. Gimel (17-24): Open My Eyes!
4. Daleth (25-32): Revive me in Your Word.
5. He (33-40): Ending Well.
6. Vav (41-48): Walking and Trusting.
7. Zayin (49-56): Help Me Remember.
8. Heth (57-64). The Lord is My Portion.
9. Teth (65-72): How Affliction brings the servant back.
10. Yodh (73-80): Unashamed in Your Word.
11. Kaph (81-88): Deep in Persecution but revived by lovingkindness.
12. Lamedh (89-96): Your Word Stands Forever.
13. Mem (97-104): Meditating on the Word.
14. Nun (105-112): Like a Light Guiding in Your Word.

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15. Samekh (113-120): Facing Evildoers and the safety in Your Word.
16. Ayin (121-128): The Servant hates falsehood and values Your Word.
17. Pe (129-136): Your Word Shines on Us.
18. Tsadhe (137-144): Zeal for Your Righteous Word.
19. Qoph (145-152): Crying out for God's Word.
20. Resh (153-160): Rescue Me by Your Word.
21. Shin (161-168): Loving Your Word.
22. Tav (169-176): Bring my body and my life to complete subject to Your Word.

The Psalm ends on the reminder that the power and greatness of God's word does not rest only in its literary brilliance. Its greatness and glory is in the fact that God comes to us and seeks us in and through His word.

- "I do not think that there could possibly be a more appropriate conclusion of such a Psalm as this, so full of the varied experience and the ever-changing frames and feelings even of a child of God, in the sunshine and the cloud, in the calm and in the storm, than this ever-clinging sense of his propensity to wander, and the expression of his utter inability to find his way back without the Lord's guiding hand to restore him." (Bouchier, cited in Spurgeon).
- "As far as I have been able, as far as I have been aided by the Lord, I have treated throughout, and expounded, this great Psalm. A task which more able and learned expositors have performed, or will perform better; nevertheless, my services were not to be withheld from it on that account." (Augustine, cited in Spurgeon).