

PSALM 119

EXALTATION OF THE INSPIRED, INERRANT, INFALLABLE WORD OF GOD

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INTRODUCTION: There is no inscription to Psalm 119 or other record of its human authorship, but it was very probably penned by Ezra (other suggestions have included David, Hezekiah, Daniel and Nehemiah). In Jewish tradition, reverence of Ezra as a prophet of the LORD is second only to Moses. Ezra organized the Hebrew canon of Scripture as it exists today (i.e., the Old Testament), developed the ministry/vocation of the scribes to reproduce and preserve the Hebrew text, and conceived of and instituted the synagogue (first in Babylon) for the purpose of instructing the Jewish people in the Scriptures. The scheme of daily Scripture readings still employed in synagogues today is exactly that devised by Ezra (circa 500 BC). Ezra's personal, lifelong passion was to understand the totality of God's Word, obey it, and teach others to understand and obey it as well (Ezr7:10). No individual in the Bible loved the Scriptures more than Ezra, and Psalm 119 is apparently the inspired personal testimony of Ezra's adoration of the Word of God.

It is not possible to over-emphasize the importance of God's Word. God Himself exalts His Word even above His own Name (Ps138:2). Psalm 119 can be thought of as an elaboration of 2 Timothy 3:16-17, which declares the divine *inspiration* (v16; Cp. Ps119:9,11,97-104,130) of the written Scriptures and their total *sufficiency* (v17; Cp. Ps119:98-100) in the life of the believer.

Psalm 119 by far the longest chapter in the Bible, and it is structurally quite unique. Its 176 verses are organized in 22 stanzas of 8 verses each, with the 22 stanzas corresponding, in alphabetical order, to the 22 Hebrew consonants (there are no vowels in the Hebrew alphabet). Each of the 8 verses in a stanza begins with its designated Hebrew letter. Psalms having such a structure are termed acrostic psalms; the other acrostic psalms are Psalm 9, 10, 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, and 145 (Proverbs 31:10-31 and the Book of Lamentations also contain an acrostic structure). The number 22 is very significant in Jewish numerology: there are 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet; there are 22 works of divine creation (Genesis 1-2); there are 22 generations from Adam to Jacob (i.e., the first Jew); and there are 22 books in the Hebrew canon of Scripture. Also significant, 8 is the number of new beginning/resurrection (Matt28:1), and it is the Word of God that is said to give eternal life (e.g., Ps119:25; 1Pet1:23).

Psalm 119 uses 8 different synonyms for the Word of God, or the Scriptures; in English, these synonyms are rendered law, word or words (translation of two different words in Hebrew), commandments, precepts, testimonies, statutes, and judgments/ordinances (both these English words translate the same Hebrew word). In its 176 verses, God is mentioned 176 times, and God's Word is also mentioned 176 times; 6 verses contain no reference to the Scriptures (vv3,37,84,90,122,132), but 6 verses contain two references to the Scriptures (vv16,43,48,160,168,172). The psalmist refers to the effect of the Word of God on his personal life over 130 times. Seven times (vv15,23,48,78,97,99,148) the psalmist speaks of the knowledge, comfort and power that come from his continual *meditation* on the Word of God (Cp. Ps1:2).

--- A'LEPH ---

- [1] This grand psalm exalting the inspired, inerrant, infallible Word of God opens with a blessing for the one who is undefiled "in the way", accomplished by walking "in the law of the LORD". The Hebrew word rendered "way" can have the meaning of 'manner', 'habit', 'journey', 'course of life', or even 'moral character', and thus is a reference to all aspects of one's daily walk.

The first synonym used for the Word of God is "law" (Heb., *torah*). This is actually the most general and most comprehensive of the terms used for the Word of God, having the idea of the totality of teaching, instruction, and doctrine that have come from the LORD (it is not always a reference to the Mosaic Law).

- [2] The blessing is repeated, emphasizing that it is for the one who obeys "the testimonies" of the LORD (Jn7:16-17) and "seek Him with the whole heart" (Jer29:13). The Hebrew word rendered "testimonies" refers to God's own declaration of His will.

Thus, the blessing is for the one who knows the Word of God, understands from it God's stated purpose and will, and then orders his whole life to walk in accordance with it.

--- BĒTH ---

- [9] Knowledge of and meditation on the Word of God brings purity to the life of a believer (Jn15:3; 17:17); the Apostle John notes that this is most especially true regarding meditation on the Lord's return (1Jn3:2-3). This is especially appropriate for the "young man", whose lusts and passions are naturally strong and prone to be defiled in both thought and deed (Prov1:4,10; 4:10-17; 6:20).

This verse is the thought behind the Fundamentalist proverb, "The Bible will keep you from sin, or sin will keep you from the Bible".

- [11] Since one's words and deeds proceed out of the condition of the heart (Matt12:34-35; 15:17-20), it is important not only to purge one's heart of all unclean thoughts, but also to positively fill it with the Word of God (Philip4:8; cf. Luk11:24-26). The Hebrew word translated "hidden" means to 'store up' or 'treasure'; more than just memorizing Scripture (which is certainly included here), the cherishing of it is commended (see Job 23:12).

The entire Mosaic system of required sacrifices was instituted as a way for the Old Testament believer to "cover" his "sin through ignorance" (Lev4:2; 5:15-17). Ignorance of the requirements of God is not an excuse for sin; the remedy to this is God's Word hidden in the heart.

--- GÎ'MEL ---

- [18] This verse is my prayer every time I open the Word of God to read and study. To the unbeliever, the Bible is a closed book

(Jn8:47; 1Cor2:14). But for the child of God who is in communion with the Lord (Jn15:3-7) and filled with His Spirit (Eph5:18), God the Holy Spirit operates in His ministry of illumination to open the eyes of the believer to God's Word (Jn16:13-15; 1Cor2:9-13).

The Hebrew word rendered "behold" means 'to see with discernment' or 'understand'. It is God's desire that we know and understand His Word (Deut29:29; Rom15:4). Certainly, this demands diligent labor on our part (2Tim2:15), but it is not merely an academic exercise; unless the Holy Spirit teaches us, little fruit will come of our labors in the Scriptures. Also critical is obedience to what we already know of God's revealed truth; the Lord Jesus taught that revealed truth, understood and obeyed, will bring the believer more understanding (Jn7:16-17; 8:31-32).

- [24] The testimonies of the LORD found in His written Word should not only be our "delight" (i.e., that which brings us pleasure), but also our "counselors" (Lit., 'men of my counsel'). The Word of God, with its testimonies, precepts, and revealed will of God, ministered to us by the Holy Spirit of God (Jn14:16; 16:7-11-18) and perhaps by Godly men (2Cor1:4), must be our counselors, not psychologists/psychiatrists and their godless, unbiblical (even anti-biblical) theories (Ps1:1-2).

--- DA'LETH ---

- [25] The linkage of the soul (Heb., *nephesh*) and dust is an allusion to the fall of man and his consequent mortality (Gen2:7; 3:14,19). In the day that Adam sinned, he died spiritually (Gen2:17; Eph2:1). As a result, fallen man's dead spirit needs to be "quicken" (i.e., made alive). The means God uses to bring life to our spirits is His Word (1Pet1:23; Js1:18).

--- ZA'YIN ---

- [49] The Biblical concept of "hope" is 'the confident expectation that what God has promised will come to pass' (Rom4:16-21; 8:24-25). Thus, the "hope" of the believer is inextricably linked to God's Word. On His part, God never forgets His promises (e.g., Ex2:24; Rom11:29).

--- LA'MEDH ---

- [89] The Word of God is eternal; it is "settled" (i.e., established) in "heaven" and will endure beyond the present "heaven and earth" (Matt24:35; Mk13:31; Luk16:17; 21:33; 1Pet1:23-25). The Jewish mind recognized 3 "heavens": the atmosphere (the abode of the birds), the night sky (the abode of the stars), and the third heaven (the abode of God; 2Cor12:2); in this verse, the abode of God is in view.

When we trust in the Word of God, we put our faith in the surest, most enduring thing possible (Cp., Matt7:24-27). This is the

thought of the grand old hymn, "How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord, is laid for your faith in His excellent Word".

--- MÈM ---

- [97] Continual meditation on, resulting in **an intimate knowledge of, the Word of God** should be the norm for the believer (Ps1:2). We don't love what we don't know. A love for God's Word is developed by daily Bible reading and study. Bullinger's conclusion was that for the Christian, "a [merely] casual acquaintance with the Bible is sinful".

Biblical meditation is 'a devotional exercise of contemplation', which involves extended periods of concentrated thought. If a synonym for meditate is 'muse', think about what an obsession with *amusement* really means.

- [99] Compare with v66. As God's revelation to us, the Bible teaches us things that can be known no other way, in addition to infallibly guiding our thinking in every area of life—not just in spiritual matters, but in matters of history, science, etc. Since the Bible is only an open book to the believer illumined by the Spirit of God (1Cor2:9-14), to know and fear the Lord and to be taught by His Word is truly the source of all knowledge, understanding and wisdom (Prov1:7; 9:10).
- [104] As Christians, our worldview must be built on the inspired testimony of the Bible in every area of life (Rom12:2; 2Cor10:5). God's Word sits in judgment of every theory of man (e.g., cosmology, evolution, uniformitarian geology, secular psychology, humanism, Marxism, environmentalism, jurisprudence, etc.), not vice-versa.

--- NUN ---

- [105] The Word of God is metaphorically said to be a "lamp" and a "light" (Cp., Prov6:23). The thought is that God's Word reveals things to us that we could not see without it. The Apostle Peter, using the same metaphor applied especially to the prophetic Word, advises that "ye do well that ye take heed" to it. Similarly, the Apostle Paul says that the pagans of old (but true of the pagans of today) who attempt to find spiritual truth apart from God's revelation to man through His Word are as men groping and feeling their way around in the dark (Act17:27).

Just as we would never think of attempting to find our way through a dark forest without a "lamp", we should not attempt to live life without the "light" the Word of God brings to every area of our lives.

--- PÈ ---

- [131] As believers, we should possess a natural appetite for the Word of God. The Apostle Peter says our desire for the Word of God

should be like that of an infant who craves his mother's milk (1Pet2:2; see also Job23:12; Jer15:16; Ps119:103).

--- TSADHĒ' ---

- [142] "Righteousness" is defined by the character of God, which is "everlasting" because God never changes (Mal3:6). God's righteousness is revealed in His Word and becomes the standard of righteousness for us (Lev11:44-45; 1Pet1:16).

Here, God's "law" is the Hebrew word *torah*, which is often used denotatively as a reference to the requirements of the Mosaic covenant (i.e., the Law of Moses), but is used here in its broader sense meaning the entire teaching/doctrine of the LORD as given in His Word. It is noted in this verse that the *torah*, or teaching, of God (i.e., the Bible) is "*the truth*", meaning it is the standard against which all other claims must be evaluated (Isa8:20; Jn17:17). The Word of God sits in judgment of everything (Heb4:12; Jas1:23-25), and nothing sits in judgment of it.

--- RĒSH ---

- [160] This verse teaches the *plenary* inspiration of Scripture (2Tim3:16). Plenary inspiration means that Scripture is equally inspired (and thus, inerrant/infallible) in total as well as in all its parts (Matt5:18). Thus, the creation account (i.e., "the beginning"), the histories, the genealogies, and the miracles, as well as the spiritual truth (i.e., the gospel), found in the Bible are all inspired by God and equally "true".