

Psalm 119

Many people are familiar with the 119th Psalm due to its being the longest "chapter" of the Bible. No doubt it has been the answer to many a trivia question throughout the years. It is so much more than that though. At its least, it is a beautiful hymn of praise to God for His inspired Word. At its most, it is the product of Divine inspiration, as the Holy Spirit gave each word to His human penman.

From a literary standpoint, Psalm 119 manifests its magnificence in the writer's use of each of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet as a distinctive designation for the psalm's various parts. Not only do each of these letters begin their respective sections, they also serve as the beginning letter for each verse in that section. In other words, the first eight verses are headed by the first letter in the Hebrew alphabet, "aleph." Each of those eight verses also begins with that particular letter. As each consecutive letter heads the remaining 21 sections, so do they also begin each verse of their respective stanzas.

Going beyond the literary uniqueness of the psalm, we proceed now to its glorious theme. It is often referred to by uninspired men as a "Torah psalm," the word "Torah" being a term for the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament. The significance of the label is that the Psalm focuses on the great power and majesty of God's Holy Word. Consider a sampling of statements from the psalm that attest to this:

"For ever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven." (verse 89)

"The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple." (verse 130)

"Thy testimonies that thou hast commanded are righteous and very faithful." (verse 138)

"Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and thy law is the truth." (verse 142)

"Thou art near, O Lord; and all thy commandments are truth." (verse 151)

Beyond offering mere lip service to God's Word, the Psalmist clearly shows why God's Word is so marvelous. Throughout his poem the author decries the disobedience of his generation (e.g., verse 139) and pleads with God regarding those disobedient ones who were persecuting him for his faithfulness to the Lord (e.g., verse 86). In short, the Psalmist personally experienced the value of God's Word for helping him deal with and overcome the evil temptations of his persecutors. With this in mind he wrote:

"Princes also did sit and speak against me: but thy servant did meditate in thy statutes." (verse 23)

"This is my comfort in my affliction: for thy word hath quickened me." (verse 50)

"Unless thy law had been my delights, I should then have perished in mine affliction." (verse 92)

When you read Psalm 119, you're reading the inspired words of a man who knew the power of God's Word, who appreciated the Word and who devoted a poem to honoring God for giving that Word. What's in that psalm for us today? That Word of God of which the Psalmist wrote is just as powerful and effective today as it was then (Romans 15:4; Hebrews 4:12). It has the same ability to comfort, strengthen and keep us in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation (Philippians 2:14-16). It is the same Word that "endureth for ever." (I Peter 1:24).

Psalm 119 clearly shows us a man of God who saw the two roads of life (Matthew 7:13-14). He chose the narrow way to heaven, the one paved by the rock solid words of the Almighty God. He knew those words so well that they became his counselors (verse 24) and his guiding light (verse 105). Each of us needs to take the time to meditate upon the 119th Psalm. May this inspired section of God's Holy Scripture, along with all of the Bible, be our "meditation all the day" (verse 97) so that we can say with the Psalmist, "How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" (verse 103).

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