

## May 19, 2021 | Wednesday Night Live | Psalm 119: Learning the Letters of Scripture

### Week 3 | Psalm 119:9-16 | Beth

We're in week 3 of our study through Psalm 119. The best way to look at the largest chapter of the Bible is to view it as a kaleidoscope.<sup>1</sup> A kaleidoscope has varying colors with multifaceted shards of glass embedded throughout, all of which are unique, but all are illuminated when held to the light. Likewise, Psalm 119, with its 22 complex and unique stanzas, is illuminated by the theme of God's word. The largest chapter of the Bible is about the Bible. Thus, while the focus of each line is unpredictable, this singular thread is woven throughout: "Learning the letters of Scripture teaches us how to live." And, aside from its central theme, God's word, there are three other themes woven throughout the psalm: the Psalmist lives in an alien culture and, because of this, he is discouraged and so is looking for a pathway through this life that honors God. This means the entire psalm is a prayer from the writer to God, a one-on-one conversation.

Today, we move on to the second letter of the Hebrew alphabet, Bet. <Insert Picture>

**READ:** Psalm 119:9-16 (ESV)

#### Beth

<sup>9</sup> How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word.

<sup>10</sup> With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments!

<sup>11</sup> I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.

<sup>12</sup> Blessed are you, O Lord; teach me your statutes!

<sup>13</sup> With my lips I declare all the rules of your mouth.

---

<sup>1</sup> Allen, Leslie C., *Psalm 101-150*, The World Biblical Commentary, Volume 21, (Nashville, TN; Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2002), p. 181.

<sup>14</sup> In the way of your testimonies I delight as much as in all riches.

<sup>15</sup> I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways.

<sup>16</sup> I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word.

The next term that refers to Scripture is “word.” Unlike “law” (tôrâ) which is the term used most in Psalm 119 to refer to Scripture (25x’s), “word” (dâvâr) is used only 19x’s.<sup>2</sup>

What does the term “word” mean?

Interestingly, the word “law” does not occur in this stanza.<sup>3</sup> Unlike “law,” “word” is not so easily distinguished as it’s so broad (1,439x’s in the OT). However, the term “word” may emphasize spoken instructions instead of written commands. As Michael Wilcock puts it, “He is [after all] a God who speaks....”<sup>4</sup> This may seem unimpressive, but especially given the OT context where deities were never actually heard from, the fact that our God has a voice and has used it to speak is a significant distinction. What does the voice of God sound like? Is it deep or high-pitched? We’d assume He can make it sound like whatever he wants, but the fact that there is a tone and pitch to his voice makes God seem all the more real. What’s more, Jesus was a real man with a real voice who really lived and, presumably, has a voice that is unique and doesn’t vary. Thus, one cannot help but wonder what the voice of Jesus sounds like. Jesus even references the recognizable aspect of God’s voice when he said in John 10:27, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.” In fact, the driving metaphor John uses throughout his account of Jesus’ life is that the Christ is the very Word of God made flesh. To see and believe in Jesus is to see and believe that God’s thought given a voice, which always was, took on a physical form and dwelt among men for 33 ½ years and is alive forever.

There is a loose thread which ties this next stanza together. It is that of various utterances. The Psalmist worships God (vs. 12), he then openly declares God’s word to others (vs. 13), and

---

<sup>2</sup> Longman, Tremper, III, & David E. Garland, *Psalms*, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Revised Edition, Volume 5, (Grand Rapids; Zondervan Academic, 2008), p. 860.

<sup>3</sup> Wilcock, Michael, *The Message of Psalms 73-150*, The Bible Speaks Today, (Downers Grove, Ill; InterVarsity Press Academic, 2001), p. 195.

<sup>4</sup> Wilcock (2001), p. 194.

then, in his quieter moments, he is **muttering** to himself all that he has learned in the Scriptures (vs. 15).

What are the principles the Psalmist is trying to instill?

- Vs. 9      Purity of way is “guarded” by obeying God’s spoken instructions (“word”). This is a message for the old, to be sure, but it is also a lesson that all the “young” must learn. Only their Heavenly Father’s voice can lead them away from the impure path. Like the entire book of Proverbs, this stanza is primarily addressed to the adolescent.
- Vs. 10     Like the previous stanza, here we have a statement voicing the desire of the Psalmist. He has given himself totally (“whole heart”) to God, and, as such, he is requesting that God keep him from deviating (“wander”) from God’s “commandments.” In this, he admits his commitment to God but does not forget his tendency to fail. The Psalmist wishes from the depth of his being to never stray from the path but, instead, he hopes to wholly seek after the Lord. And his assurance is rooted in God’s assistance.
- Vs. 11     The spoken instructions (“word”) of God have not fallen on deaf ears. Quite the contrary, the Psalmist has treasured those words and “stored” them in the silo of his heart as if they were grains from a harvest (i.e., memorization).<sup>5</sup> This has a preventative effect that keeps the Psalmist from sinning against God. It would seem that when one satisfies themselves on God’s word, one will not go searching for a way to gratify the desires of one’s flesh. This is all the truer when one considers that the term translated for “word” here can also be translated as “promises.”<sup>6</sup> This implies that the vows God’s made to us help us a straying.
- Vs. 12     Once again, the Psalmist is expressing his inner thoughts. He wants God to be “blessed,” and He wants God, and no one else, to teach him his “statues.” And, just as he did in verse 7, the Psalmist tells us that worship

---

<sup>5</sup> Longman (2008), p. 862.

<sup>6</sup> Allen (2002), p. 186.

and learning God's word go hand in hand.<sup>7</sup> But unlike verse 7, where the Psalmist is instructing us about the correlation between the praise of God the study of God's word, here, in verse 12, the Psalmist is in the process of direct worship. This highlights the one-on-one characteristic of this psalm.

- Vs. 13      The Psalmist has so internalized God's Word that even the words with which the Psalmist speaks are not his own, but God's. He uses his own "lips" to "declare" the "rules" of God. In this, the Psalmist is now a teacher, i.e., one who teaches others what he has been taught. The Psalmist has integrated his speech with that of God's.
- Vs. 14      This verse sets off a long trend of connecting God's word with happiness.<sup>8</sup> True "delight" is not found in the *temporal* "riches" of this world but in the *eternal* testimonies of God. One can be happy and wealthy as long as their joy is rooted in the word of God. But one cannot be pleased without the Scriptures, even if they were the wealthiest person on the planet. Feelings are not to be ignored when it comes to obedience to God. How we feel about a subject will often influence our behavior. If we think that following God is a bore, we'll have very little motivation to obey. However, if life's greatest pleasures can only be experienced when we keep in line with God's "testimonies," then we'll have very little reason to abandon that path and all the reasons in the world to say on that path.
- Vs. 15      The Psalmist now declares that his murmurings ("meditate") will be that of God's "precepts." Like one who studies a book by "fixing" their eyes on the text and repeating the principles at hand, the Psalmist ruminates and muses to himself while reading the divine values before him.<sup>9</sup> Effectively, he's not only talking to others (vs. 13); he's also talking to himself about God's word. And he has his eyes, once again (vs. 6), "fixed" on them and nothing else.
- Vs. 16      Here, the Psalmist expresses a future "delight" rather than a past experience, as he did in verse 14. He has delighted in God's word before,

---

<sup>7</sup> Goldingay, John, *Psalms*, Volume 3: Psalms 90-150, The Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 3:387.

<sup>8</sup> Allen (2002), p. 186.

<sup>9</sup> Longman (2008), p. 862.

and he will do so again. Past joys fuel the desire for more, but they are not automatically guaranteed. Only the one who remembers and does not “forget” God’s word will experience that “delight” once again.

Now, typically, I'd sum up what we've learned today into a short, easy-to-remember statement. However, since each verse stands on its own and deals with varying topics, that is an impossibility. So, instead, I'm going to ask, "What's your takeaway?" Out of all the things we talked about tonight, what resonated with you the most?

For me, it was that theme of utterances in this stanza. God has given voice to his thoughts in his Word. A way to internalize that word is to meditate on it (i.e., mutter/murmur to yourself). And once we've done that, we go and teach others and/or praise God. God's word has a cyclical aspect to it, in that God speaks to us, and then we speak to ourselves, to others, and to God. And, once again, I'm reminded of the opening lines of Psalms itself, "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night."

## VIDEO DESCRIPTION

Wednesday Night Live | Psalm 119: Learning the Letters of Scripture | Week 3

TITLE: Beth

TEXT: Psalm 119:9-16

Pastor's manuscript can be found here: