

June 2, 2021 | Wednesday Night Live | Psalm 119: Learning the Letters of Scripture

Week 5 | Psalm 119:25-32 | Dalet

Today, we move on to the fourth letter of the Hebrew alphabet, Dalet.  As we've mentioned previously, the Psalmist is looking for a "way" through this life. In this fourth stanza, a reference to a "way" (be it God's or man's) is made five times in eight verses. This is not surprising as the Hebrew word for "way" (deh'-rek) begins with the Hebrew letter Dalet. Thus, in this Dalet portion of Psalm 119, the Psalmist is pleading for direction away from the "ways" of this life (vs. 26, 29) and toward the "ways" of the next life (vs. 27, 30, 32). A fitting theme, if it can be called that, for this stanza. What's more, requests and resolutions are interwoven throughout, where our writer expresses a need that God must meet and then commits himself to some action when God responds.

READ: Psalm 119:25-32 (ESV)

Dalet

²⁵ My soul clings to the dust; give me life according to your word!

²⁶ When I told of my ways, you answered me; teach me your statutes!

²⁷ Make me understand the way of your precepts, and I will meditate on your wondrous works.

²⁸ My soul melts away for sorrow; strengthen me according to your word!

²⁹ Put false ways far from me and graciously teach me your law!

³⁰ I have chosen the way of faithfulness; I set your rules before me.

³¹ I cling to your testimonies, O Lord; let me not be put to shame!

³² I will run in the way of your commandments when you enlarge my heart!

The next term that refers to Scripture is "statues." "Statues" (*chôq*) is used only 21x's in Psalm 119.¹

What does the term "statues" mean?

The term "statues" refers to the engraving of God. While it can refer to the written aspects of God's law, it may have a more nuanced meaning referring to actual contours

¹ Longman, Tremper, III, & David E. Garland, *Psalms*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Revised Edition, Volume 5, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2008), p. 859.

and characteristics of the writing itself. In other words, studying the look of a text, not unlike a graphologist, reveals who was behind the mark. Likewise, God's "statues," displayed in the created world, are proof of his handwriting (cf. Gen. 1:27; Ex. 31:18; Deut. 9:10; Ps. 148:1-8; Eph. 2:10).² And as words etched in stone, God's handwritten statues have a binding and permanent place in the cosmos (cf. Isa. 30:8).³

What are the principles the Psalmist is trying to instill in this fourth stanza?

Vs. 25 This verse has clear connections with the creation narrative. God formed man out of "dust" (cf. Gen. 2:7), giving human beings "life" through nothing but His spoken "word" (see "*dâvâr*," p. 10). However, the idea of returning to the dust is also a metaphor for death itself (cf. Gen. 3:17).⁴ Thus, here, the Psalmist's "soul clings" to the ground itself as a way to express his dire situation. He is hugging the dirt. His literal demise may be at hand, or he could be at a figurative low point in his life. Either way, his only hope rests on God's "word." And why not? Man's very existence is owed to the words of God; why not man's revival too? Just like the genesis of reality itself, so our life depends upon the spoken word of God.

Vs. 26 God knows the ways of man because He is omniscient. But God's omniscience is not needed with Psalmist because he actually proclaims ("told") his own ways to God. Our wandering Psalmist does not hide the details of his journey but gives an honest accounting of them. And how does God respond to this report? He "answers" the Psalmist. We're not told what this answer is, but that isn't really the point. The point is that God *responded*. When we pray, God never ignores us (cf. Ps 3:4; 20:9; 27:7; 91:15). And this knowledge of God's response fuels a desire to want to know more about God's "statues." The Psalmist wants to see the handwriting of God in every aspect of his life.

Vs. 27 This verse is a recap of three ideas already mentioned before in Psalm 119: first, scriptural illumination comes from God—only God can "make" the learning ("understanding") of His word possible; second, should God come through on this request, the response of the Psalmist is that he will mutter

² Ibid.

³ Kidner, Derek, *Psalm 73-150*, The Kidner Classic Commentaries, (Downers Grove, ILL: Inter-Varsity Press Academic, Reprint, 2008), p. 453-454.

⁴ Allen, Leslie C., *Psalm 101-150*, The World Biblical Commentary, Volume 21, (Nashville, TN; Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2002), p. 187.

("meditate") on what he's being taught; and, lastly, what he's being taught is thought of as extraordinary ("wonderous").

- Vs. 28 Once again, our Psalmist is in distress (cf. vs. 25). The term "melts away" (*dâlah*) is a rare word in the OT (cf. Job 16:20; Ecc. 10:18), and it suggests a dissolving of the "soul" due to "sorrow." Here he tells us that he is so overcome with grief that he does not have the strength to stand anymore. Like an ice cube exposed to the sun, he has liquefied. The Hebrew phrasing literally means his spirit has softened into tears giving the sense that he is spiritually weary.⁵ Whatever strength and fortitude he had are now in a puddle at his feet. His only hope for a "strengthening" is to be found in God's "word." Meaning, the Scriptures can take a coward's heart and turn it courageous. Men who are prone to flight stand their ground when supported by the verses, phrases, and principles of the bible.
- Vs. 29 As the Psalmist has already made clear, we are prone to wander (cf. vs. 10). Given a choice, we will choose the "false path" every single time. Thus, our writer requests that those wrong ways be removed from the way before him. He doesn't even want to see them. This does not absolve him from responsibility. He must make every effort to remove the pitfalls that lead him to sin (cf. Pro. 4:24, 27; Rom. 13:14). He will say as much in the very next verse. But no matter how hard he may try, he knows that he is nothing more than an imperfect being living in an imperfect world. He needs the help of a perfect God. Only when the Lord "graciously" teaches him the Torah ("law") will he know the difference between the good and evil path. And only with God's assistance will the Psalmist go against his own nature and chose the right way.
- Vs. 30 The Psalmist here expresses the fact that, when given a choice, he has "chosen the way of faithfulness." However, as verse 29 made clear, this choosing has been made possible only through the grace of God. So, which is it? Do we choose, or has God chosen for us? The answer lies somewhere between fate and free will. Both are clear principles in Scripture. Both seem to be at odds with one another. And, yet, there is no resolution. However, what *is* clear is that the Psalmist's free will to choose the pathway of God is

⁵ Goldingay, John, *Psalms*, Volume 3: Psalms 90-150, The Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 3:394-395.

assured because he has “set” God’s directions (“rules”) before him. Thus, though man has agency over his life, he must have God's word in front of him if he wants to act appropriately.

Vs. 31 Our Psalmist is in a much better state of mind now. Rather than being brought low and clinging to the dust of the earth like before (cf. vs. 25), the Psalmist says he's holding ("cling") onto the "testimonies" of God. Within a matter of just a few verses, he's done a complete 180-degree turn. Like wet clothes stuck to the skin (cf. Jer. 13:11), our sojourner says he's sticking to God's testaments. Wherever they lead, he will go. And whatever they tell him to do, he will do. And what awaits him at the end of his life? Honor. Rather than being “put to shame,” those who fix themselves to God’s word will be commended.

Vs. 32 “enlarge my heart” is better translated as “broadened my mind.” Hence, the sense of this verse is that God has opened up the Psalmist’s comprehension. He is no longer confined to a simplistic understanding of the world; instead, he has an unparalleled awareness of his surroundings (cf. 1 Ki. 3:12; 4:29, 32).⁶ Rather than see the world in one monochromatic color, the Psalmist sees his existence in all its kaleidoscopic hues. Far from being prohibitive to learning, the word of God unshackles the intellect (cf. Ps. 118:5). Far from hobbling us to a mere walking pace, the "commandments" of God teach us how to "run." God's word widens our gate, steadies our feet, and quickens our step (cf. Isa. 40:31). And when God broadens our horizon, life becomes a “spacious place” good for a long-distance race (cf. Heb. 12:1-3).⁷ This is a cheerful end to what would’ve otherwise been a rather cheerless stanza.

"What's your takeaway?" Out of all the things we talked about tonight, what resonated with you the most?

My takeaway this evening is how God's word "broadens" the mind. Too often, we're told that faith clouds our judgment and inhibits progress. This is not so. Only when we learn God's word will we know how the world actually works.

⁶ Goldingay (2008), 3:396; Allen (2002), p. 187.

⁷ Wilcock, Michael, *The Message of Psalms 73-150*, The Bible Speaks Today, (Downers Grove, Ill; InterVarsity Press Academic, 2001), p. 198.

VIDEO DESCRIPTION

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TITLE: Dalet

TEXT: Psalm 119:25-32

Pastor's manuscript can be found here: <https://docdro.id/U7uDvuy>