

June 23, 2021 | Wednesday Night Live | Psalm 119: Learning the Letters of Scripture

Week 6 | Psalm 119:33-40 | He

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

In this fifth stanza, the Psalmist stresses God's activity with his abundant use of the *hiphil* in Hebrew, which indicates the *trigger* of something.¹ A causative verb in Hebrew looks something like, "Lord, please cause x or y to happen."² Thus, the Psalmist speaks of God as a teacher, provider, leader, incliner, turner, and confirmer throughout these eight verses. Essentially, the writer is asking God to do something that only God can do. In other words, this stanza is all about petitions. And while our prayers ought not be filled with requests alone, only a fool fill his prayers with words but fails to truly ask for something (cf. Mat. 6:7). God is just as honored in our praising as he is in our asking; for, in our asking, we admit that only God can give what we are asking for.

READ: Psalm 119:33-40 (ESV)

He

³³ Teach me, O Lord, the way of your statutes; and I will keep it to the end.

³⁴ Give me understanding, that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart.

³⁵ Lead me in the path of your commandments, for I delight in it.

³⁶ Incline my heart to your testimonies, and not to selfish gain!

³⁷ Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things; and give me life in your ways.

³⁸ Confirm to your servant your promise, that you may be feared.

³⁹ Turn away the reproach that I dread, for your rules are good.

⁴⁰ Behold, I long for your precepts; in your righteousness give me life!

So far, we've looked at four of the eight terms for Scripture: "statues," "commandments," "word," and "law." The next term I'd like to focus on is "testimonies." "Testimonies" (êdūwth)

¹ Goldingay, John, *Psalms*, Volume 3: Psalms 90-150, The Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 3:397.

² Wilcock, Michael, *The Message of Psalms 73-150*, The Bible Speaks Today, (Downers Grove, Ill; InterVarsity Press Academic, 2001), p. 198.

is found in Psalm 119 23x's but is the least used of the other seven synonyms in the rest of the OT at only 59x's.³

What does the term "testimonies" mean?

The term "testimonies" refers to the witness of God as is seen in the root of *êdūwth*, which translates as "testify," the act of affirming something or vouching for someone.⁴ We see this in how the term is used to refer to the ten commands and the ark of the covenant respectively as "the two tablets of Testimony" (Ex. 31:18) and "the ark of the Testimony" (Ex. 25:22). Both items vouched for God's covenantal relationship with Israel. Like a wedding ring, one need only look to these to get assurance that Yahweh entered into an exclusive partnership with the Jews. However, these testimonies are not only evidence of the kind of relationship God has with his people and but they are indicators of the sort of God he is as well.⁵ Both the ark and the ten commandments were created in a time of significant change in the life of Israel. They were rescued from bondage in Egypt. But many died in the wilderness because of their unbelief. Meaning, to look at these items of testimony teaches us that God loves and cares for his own, but he also expects his own to live according to his statutes. They not only *describe* who God is but also *direct* the footsteps of his people. Thus, the "testimonies" of God are His bold and outspoken witnesses.⁶

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

Vs. 33 Here, we have the now oft-repeated idea that the best instructor of God's Word is God himself. He is the "teacher," and we are the students. But the Psalmist cleverly talks about God's "statues" by saying that he wants to learn the "way" of them. This implies that God's Word is meant to be *lived out* and not simply *learned about*. Meaning, our sojourning singer/songwriter wants to not only understand the notes but wants to know how to play them in the real world. He's asking for God to teach him the techniques of his Word. If God does this, the Psalmist's resolve is absolute: "I will keep it till the end." Once you've learned *the* way of life, no

³ Longman, Tremper, III, & David E. Garland, *Psalms*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Revised Edition, Volume 5, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2008), p. 859.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Wilcock, Michael, *The Message of Psalms 73-150*, The Bible Speaks Today, (Downers Grove, Ill; InterVarsity Press Academic, 2001), p. 202.

⁶ Kidner, Derek, *Psalm 73-150*, The Kidner Classic Commentaries, (Downers Grove, ILL: Inter-Varsity Press Academic, Reprint, 2008), p. 453.

other “way” is as appealing. You will keep on that same way until your final days.

- Vs. 34 Almost as if he didn't make himself clear the first time, the Psalmist rephrases the verse before it. But rather than asking God to teach him, he now asks for "understanding." He knows that God teaching him the ways of his statutes will be for naught if he doesn't comprehend what God is trying to tell him. He cannot "keep" the laws if he doesn't grasp their implications on his everyday life. And rather than confirm his dedication to that way for the rest of his life, as he did before, the Psalmist commits his whole being (“whole heart”) to “observe” what he is taught. Thus, as we’ve said before, there is no such thing as a half-measure with God (vs. 4); it’s all or nothin’.
- Vs. 35 The Psalmist has spoken a lot about "delight" so far (cf. vs. 14, 16, 24). And, as we've said, true delight is not dependent upon our circumstances but upon God's Word. Thus, the Psalmist’s plea for guidance ("lead me") in the way of God's "commandments" is perfectly natural for one who finds pleasure in knowing God's Word. Knowing the Scripture has brought the Psalmist joy. Why not ask for more?
- Vs. 36 Without someone tipping the scales in favor of God's Word, we will drift toward greediness ("selfish gain"). It is in our natures to be self-serving. Thus, we need God to "incline" our hearts to his "testimonies," which teach us about the value of selflessness (cf. Ac. 20:35). You cannot be a student of the Word and remain egotistical. To read about how God emptied himself and became a man so that he might pay the price for my sin leaves me very little reason to be concerned with my own welfare and a multitude of reasons to be concerned with the welfare of others. Materialism—the want of things that are not needed—runs so rampant in the Western world that our economy would collapse without it. We are a culture driven by our need for more, and, ironically, we're only content so long as a newer model isn't on the market. But God's Word teaches us that less is more, that only contentment can give us true peace, and that covetousness overpromises and underdelivers.
- Vs. 37 This verse continues nicely on the discussion of the previous verse. Every day we are presented with a long string of "worthless things" which is

another way of saying things that are “morally evil.”⁷ Be it on tv, the internet, or during our everyday lives, we are constantly seeing things that simply have no point. Its fluff. It’s here one minute and then gone the next. It is never a question of *if* we will see them; instead, it's a question of whether or not we will get distracted by them. We're like babies who are easily preoccupied with shiny things. We need God to "turn" our "eyes" away by “dimming the luster of this world” so that we do not get mesmerized by the meaningless.⁸ "Life" is found, not in the ways of this life, but in the "ways" of the next life. The world is constantly trying to tell us how to live life to the fullest, but only God can tell us how to do that. And if we're not careful, we'll start believing the propaganda that we'll only be happy if we _____ .

- Vs. 38 A “promise” is just words until it’s backed up with action (“confirm”). Thus, the Psalmist wants God to go through with whatever he has promised. We’re not given a clue as to which promise the writer is referring to you. However, the confirmation of that unknown promise has a clear emotional response: “fear.” Now, this kind of fear is not in the sense of terror or fright. Though, what other emotion would we experience if we were to come face-to-face with the One who "measured the seas with the hollow of his hand" (cf. Isa. 40:12)? Instead, to fear God is to revere God; it means we pay homage to the One who controls everything. With a word, he spoke existence itself into being. When God delivers on a promise he made, a sobering thought ought to enter our minds: the most powerful being in the universe hears and answers us (cf. Ps. 8:3-4). What's more, God fulfilling his promises not only increases our own reverence for him but also may spread the fear of God on all.
- Vs. 39 Our Psalmist has already spoken about the scorn all true followers of God experience (cf. vs. 22). Here again, the writer, feeling the pressure around him, cannot help but ask for relief from God. "Reproach" has its sights set on him. Like a missile, it's speeding toward its target, and the only One who can rescue ("turn away") the mark is God. This experience is not enjoyable. The Psalmist says he "dreads" it. To garner scorn and contempt from one's

⁷ Allen, Leslie C., *Psalm 101-150*, The World Biblical Commentary, Volume 21, (Nashville, TN; Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2002), p. 187.

⁸ Longman (2008), p. 866.

community simply for obeying the "good" rules of God is not something we should yearn for but rather shrink from. Nevertheless, if they hated Christ, they will hate us also (cf. Jn. 15:18). In this life, suffering is inevitable. But any taunt, ridicule, and disdain we experience in this life will be wiped away by our good works in the next life (cf. Mat. 5:16).

Vs. 40 The Psalmist has only "longing" in his heart for the "precepts" of God (cf. Mr. 14:38). He is obsessed with them. Why? Because God's Word assures of God's character: "righteousness." Of everything we know about God from God's Word, we see that he is pure, good, and faithful. If he weren't, God would've started over after we failed in the garden. But because God is full of righteousness, we continue to live ("give me life"). Essentially, the Psalmist says, "God, look at me. I'm consumed with your Word. I want nothing more! So give me life!"

"What's your takeaway?"

My takeaway this evening is this: God has promised to provide for my needs. I should be content with that because even he cannot satiate my greed. And refusing to control my desires means consuming my life and destroying my peace.

VIDEO DESCRIPTION

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TEXT: Psalm 119:33-40

Pastor's manuscript can be found here: