

## June 30, 2021 | Wednesday Night Live | Psalm 119: Learning the Letters of Scripture

Week 7 | Psalm 119:41-48 | Vav

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

A vav by itself means “and.”<sup>1</sup> Thus, theoretically, this stanza would’ve been an easy one for our poet as he could’ve strung together any number of topics by simply adding an “and.” Not unlike a laundry list, the result would’ve produced a stanza comprised of loosely connected thoughts with little flow. Instead, the Psalmist breaks form and does something rather clever. He ties together all eight verses into one flowing stanza with a singular premise located in the first verse. This is why, unlike the previous stanzas, all of the verses in this stanza should be taken in conjunction with one another. Essentially, verses forty-one to forty-eight is one long run-on sentence connected by eight “ands” demonstrating for us what a well-rounded Bible aficionado looks like. As if to illustrate this point, this is also the first stanza in Psalm 119 that utilizes all eight synonyms for God's word.<sup>2</sup>

**READ:** Psalm 119:41-48 (ESV)

### Waw

<sup>41</sup> Let your steadfast love come to me, O Lord, your salvation according to your promise;

<sup>42</sup> then shall I have an answer for him who taunts me, for I trust in your word.

<sup>43</sup> And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth, for my hope is in your rules.

<sup>44</sup> I will keep your law continually, forever and ever, <sup>45</sup> and I shall walk in a wide place, for I have sought your precepts.

<sup>46</sup> I will also speak of your testimonies before kings and shall not be put to shame, <sup>47</sup> for I find my delight in your commandments, which I love.

<sup>48</sup> I will lift up my hands toward your commandments, which I love, and I will meditate on your statutes.

The next term I’d like to focus on for Scripture is the word “promise.” “Promise” (*imrâh*) occurs nineteen times in Psalm 119 and thirty-seven times in all O.T.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Wilcock, Michael, *The Message of Psalms 73-150*, The Bible Speaks Today, (Downers Grove, Ill; InterVarsity Press Academic, 2001), p. 199.

<sup>2</sup> Wilcock (2001), p. 200.

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

What does the term “promise” mean?

As in our study of the term “word,” (see pg. 10), “promise” is a nonspecific term.<sup>4</sup> In fact, more often than not, this term is translated as “word” rather than “promise,” as is here in our text. And while the English translation of *imrâh* may seem to imply the word means something akin to an oath or pledge, the reality is that *imrâh* is derived from the verb “to say.”<sup>5</sup> In this way, it is a general term referring to any and all speech and not primarily vows (cf. Gen. 4:23; Deut. 32:2; Pa. 17:6).<sup>6</sup> This is not to take away from the fact that whatever God says, we can assume that they are as tried and true as any explicit promise (cf. 2 Sam. 22:31; Ps. 12:6). However, we need not press the issue further than say that God's *imrâh* is trustworthy (cf. Lam. 2:17). God is a “man” of His word. He says what He means, and He means what He says. Duplicitous speech is no creation of our Heavenly Father but of that old serpent, the Devil (cf. Jn. 8:44).

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

Vs. 41        Here, the Psalmist expresses a dire need for God to commit (“let your”) something to him. In this case, our singer/songwriter is asking both for God's “steadfast love” and “salvation.” Each of which is expressed through God's “promises.” Interestingly, the term translated as “steadfast love” is the Hebrew word *khesēd*. This term refers to the unique/covenantal fondness God has for His people, the Israelites, what Leslie C. Allen calls God’s “loyal love.”<sup>7</sup> This kind of affection is not conditional or based on merit but is expressed simply because as God is love, he cannot help but express love toward others (cf. Jn. 3:16; Rom. 8:28-39; 1 Jn. 4:7-21). In other words, *khesēd* is God’s unmerited favor of his people (cf. Gen. 32:10; Num. 14:19; Psa. 136; Ru. 3:10).<sup>8</sup> The reason for the Psalmist's request becomes apparent in the next verse, but suffice to say, his only hope rests entirely on what God has told him.

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<sup>4</sup> Kidner, Derek, *Psalm 73-150*, The Kidner Classic Commentaries, (Downers Grove, ILL: Inter-Varsity Press Academic, Reprint, 2008), p. 454.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Wilcock (2001), p. 202.

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

<sup>8</sup> General Editors, “How do we describe God’s Love?”, January 12, 2021, *The Bible Project*, [https://bibleproject.com/blog/how-do-we-describe-gods-love/?utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_source=youtube&utm\\_campaign=season\\_7&utm\\_content=loyallove](https://bibleproject.com/blog/how-do-we-describe-gods-love/?utm_medium=social&utm_source=youtube&utm_campaign=season_7&utm_content=loyallove) [accessed, June 30, 2021].

- Vs. 42 The reason for God to show his steadfast love and salvation for the Psalmist now becomes clear. Apparently, our sojourning musician is being “taunted” by someone. Ridicule and mockery are often the background music for the follower of God. The Psalmist knows that should God fulfill his promises, those who’ve been giving him such trouble will be silenced. He will have an “answer” when they mockingly ask him, “Does your God exist?” God has proven Himself faithful before, and so our writer needs only to “trust” that God will do what He has said He will do.
- Vs. 43 The Psalmist continues his plea for God to act according to His promises. Our writer fears that, should God refrain from doing so, the Psalmist will be left without a “word of truth” to respond to his critics. He is utterly and totally dependent upon God fulfilling his promises. He has no answer otherwise. In fact, it almost seems as if he does not wish to answer on behalf of God at all. Our writer wants God to answer for Himself. His only “hope” is that God is no liar but a “man” of His word, and so He will fulfill His promises.
- Vs. 44 The occurrence of the vav compels us to view this verse and those following it as being in conjunction with the initial declaration by the Psalmist that his dependence is upon God's promises (vs. 41).<sup>9</sup> Thus, the result of God fulfilling His promises is that the Psalmist will "keep" God's "law" without fail ("continually"). Nothing strengthens our resolve more than remembering how God has come through for us in the past.
- Vs. 45 Often, when we are oppressed or taunted like our Psalmist here (vs. 42), we can feel like we are pressed down and constrained on all sides. As if the very way before us is small and difficult to traverse. But when God fulfills his promises, the path before us opens up (cf. vs. 32). This is the idea that the Psalmist is expressing here when he says that he walks “in a wide place.” He is no longer prohibited from maturing, but he can now develop to his full potential.<sup>10</sup> Far from being restrained, our sojourner is walking freely on the wide-open plains guided only by God’s “precepts.” He says that he has “sought” these principles out, and, in return, they have led him upon

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<sup>9</sup> Goldingay, John, *Psalms*, Volume 3: Psalms 90-150, The Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 3:401.

<sup>10</sup> Allen (2002), p. 187.

expansive roads and on to bigger and better adventures. Indeed, when one follows the words of God, the road of life can end up leading you as far as the edges of the map itself and beyond (cf. Mat. 28:19).

- Vs. 46 This idea of traversing wide roads is continued in this verse. The Psalmist not only journeys far and wide, but he also speaks with a wide array of different and important figures (“kings”). One can't help but think of the books of the Bible written during the diaspora. Followers of God like Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther all spoke the testimonies of God before powerful kings. And, in each case, they have been honored throughout the centuries rather than but to "shame." Or, in the N.T., I cannot help but think of John the Baptist appearing before Herod (cf. Mr. 6:14-29), or the Apostle Paul speaking with King Agrippa (cf. Ac. 26).<sup>11</sup> Following God leads you to unusual places, even into the palace of royalty.
- Vs. 47 Such a life—i.e., one of expansive roads, interesting people, and vindication—has but one result: "delight." Following God's "commandments" ensures an exciting and fulfilling life. And with each passing experience, the Psalmist's "love" for the law grows. Life itself becomes a grand adventure rather than a dull and monotonous grind. Thus, finding true fulfillment and joy in life is as easy as opening the pages of Scripture.
- Vs. 48 The Psalmist now expresses his desire to honor (“I will lift up my hands”) God's "commandments." Though we should praise God, we should also show proper reverence and admiration for God's word.<sup>12</sup> Here, to close out the vav stanza, the object of the Psalmist's worship is the Scriptures themselves. And why shouldn't he want to worship the sacred word? Through the Bible, he has learned about God's *chesed* and God's promises. These two things alone have brought "delight" to the Psalmist, and they have opened the way before him so that he might walk unconstrained “in a wide place.” He has been freed through the Scriptures; why not worship that which has liberated his soul? And when you "love" something as much as the Psalmist loves the word, you can't help but mumble ("meditate") it to yourself. Like a favorite song, our sojourner whistles the tune of Scripture

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<sup>11</sup> Longman (2008), p. 868.

<sup>12</sup> Kidner (2008), p. 461.

over and over again. Thus, it seems a man wishing to speak God's word before kings must also speak God's word to himself.<sup>13</sup>

"What's your takeaway?"

My takeaway this evening is this: following God is an adventure. If I were to speak with my thirteen-year-old self and explain how that he'll go to college in F.L., travel the country while studying to be a pastor, meet a girl from N.C., get married to that girl, become a youth pastor in G.A., plan mission trips to both NYC and Ecuador, become a dad, and then end up moving to Baltimore to be a pastor, I fear that that thirteen-year-old-Ben's head would explode. But what an adventure it's been so far. I cannot wait to see what God has planned for me in the future.

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<sup>13</sup> Wilcock (2001), p. 199.

## VIDEO DESCRIPTION

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TITLE: Vav

TEXT: Psalm 119:41-48

Pastor's manuscript can be found here: