

## July 14, 2021 | Wednesday Night Live | Psalm 119: Learning the Letters of Scripture

Week 9 | Psalm 119:57-64 | Heth

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

Ever the devoted follower, our Psalmist expresses his commitment to the Lord in this stanza. Even though he only has the Lord as his one and only possession, that is more than enough for him. And sure, there was a time when he was ensnared by his enemies, but that did not cause him to abandon all that he has learned from the Lord. That wisdom is more valuable to him than his own freedom. So prized is it that our wander will be inspired to worship in the middle of the night. And along that journey, he will find others who love the Lord as much as he does. These will be his companions and his colleagues in the work of the Lord. He does not sojourn alone. Everywhere he looks, he sees evidence of God's love.

**READ:** Psalm 119:57-64 (ESV)

### Heth

<sup>57</sup> The Lord is my portion; I promise to keep your words.

<sup>58</sup> I entreat your favor with all my heart; be gracious to me according to your promise.

<sup>59</sup> When I think on my ways, I turn my feet to your testimonies;

<sup>60</sup> I hasten and do not delay to keep your commandments.

<sup>61</sup> Though the cords of the wicked ensnare me, I do not forget your law.

<sup>62</sup> At midnight I rise to praise you, because of your righteous rules.

<sup>63</sup> I am a companion of all who fear you, of those who keep your precepts.

<sup>64</sup> The earth, O Lord, is full of your steadfast love; teach me your statutes!

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

Vs. 57      Here, the Psalmist unashamedly proclaims that Yahweh is his allotment ("portion"). This is understandable because, as a sojourner, he would have no land rights. He is landless. Thus, his only possession is not only whatever the Lord gives him; but the Lord Himself is the Psalmist's one and sole ration. This means our writer is utterly dependent upon the Lord to provide for his daily needs. This exposes him to the world and makes him feel vulnerable. He is like the Levitical priests of old who served in the temple (cf.

Num. 18:20; Deut. 18:1-2).<sup>1</sup> They, too, did not own land but never did a son of Levi ever go without. God always provided for them, just as He will always provide for our wanderer. He need only to “promise” that he’ll obey (“keep”) God’s “words.” Remarkably, a pathway characterized by obedience is also a journey distinguished by plenty. And any who follow God will find that their needs are always met (cf. Mat. 6:25-33).

Vs. 58 Our writer explains how he is so taken with the Lord, that he will go so far as to court (“entreat”) the Lord’s “favor.” This term literally means to “soften the face,” or, “make the face sweet.”<sup>2</sup> The point our writer is trying to make is that far from being passive in his pursuit of God, the Psalmist has actively sought the face of God with everything he has (“with all my heart”). After all, it is only when he is well-esteemed in the eyes of the Lord that our wanderer will be given the “grace” he so desperately needs. Meaning, there is much to be said moxie, tenacity, and boldness. The Psalmist is not lax in his pursuit of God. He has not and will not coast. He has taken the Lord's "promises" to heart, and our singer/songwriter will chase them down to the ends of the earth.

Vs. 59 Meditation, contemplation, and self-examination ought to naturally flow from scriptural study. We read the Bible so that we can better understand ourselves. The Psalmist ponders (“thinks”) the path (“my ways”) before him. He considers where to place his feet, and he deliberates over the direction he should go. In that moment of rumination, he runs to the Scriptures. They provide the insight he needs to guide his journey. A map can only do so much. It can tell you where places are and how long it’ll take to get there. But the possibilities are endless. Only the Bible (“testimonies”) can tell you where exactly to plant your feet (“turn your feet”) and start the expedition.

Vs. 60 The writer of Proverbs speaks about those who rush to do evil (cf. Pro. 6:18). And Isaiah the prophet condemns those whose feet are swift to accomplish vile deeds (cf. Isa. 59:7). The Psalmist's eagerness is no less pronounced, but his aim is far more laudable. He “hastens” to observe (“keep”) God's “commandments.” And just so the point is appropriately

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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. 202.

<sup>2</sup> Allen, Leslie C., *Psalm 101-150*, The World Biblical Commentary, Volume 21, (Nashville, TN; Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2002), p. 188.

conveyed, he emphasizes his point when he says that “he does not delay.” This is in contrast to Lot who “delayed” in leaving Sodom so had to be forcibly removed by two angels (cf. Gen. 19:16).<sup>3</sup> Though our wanderer is far from home, he is not lazy or slack in his compliance to the Word. He rushes toward righteousness.

Vs. 61 As we have mentioned before, following God doesn’t mean we will avoid hardship. Daniel and his friends were some of the most faithful followers of God in all of Scripture, yet they found themselves in a lion’s den and the fiery furnace, respectively. And while we would never choose to be captured by our enemies, sometimes a net is the exact place God would have us to be. Here, the Psalmist has been tied up (“cords...ensnared me”). He’s been arrested by “wicked” men. We’re not told how it happened or why it happened. And how does our sojourner respond? He remembers (“does not forget”) God’s “law.” Persecution, affliction, and oppression are meant to pressure us into forgetting the truths of God’s Word. Our oppressors want us to think that the pain they inflict on us is more real than anything we learned from the Bible. When we are teased or tormented for our faith, may we not forget the Lord. When we are mocked and provoked for the cause of Christ, may we remember all that the Lord has done for us.

Vs. 62 Why is our Psalmist up at “midnight”? Has sleep alluded him? Have the troubles of life weighed on him so that he cannot rest? Possibly. Or, perhaps, he is up during the witching hour by choice. He has chosen to “praise” even though the sun is down and will not soon rise. Why? It is easy and almost natural to worship in the light. It is another thing entirely to sing in the dark. And when we serenade the night with the praises of our King, we remind the shadows that our God is Lord of twilight too. His “righteous rules” are not invalidated by the dark. If anything, the shadow proves the sunshine.<sup>4</sup> Thus, it does not matter whether we sing at noontide or midnight; anytime is the proper time to worship. And should we worship amid the night, we will find our courage grows with each passing verse.

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<sup>3</sup> Kidner, Derek, *Psalms 73-150*, The Kidner Classic Commentaries, (Downers Grove, ILL: Inter-Varsity Press Academic, Reprint, 2008), p. 461.

<sup>4</sup> Switchfoot, “The Shadow Proves The Sunshine,” 2005, *Sparrow/Columbia Records*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rTR7pCEZhhl>, [accessed, July 14, 2020].

- Vs. 63      While it is clear that our Psalmist views himself as an immigrant, possibly even in his own country, he does not sojourn alone. Yes, the Lord journeys with him. That, at least, has been made abundantly clear. But he has other "companions" too. And the basis for this friendship is not some hobby but a shared admiration for Yahweh.<sup>5</sup> Our wanderer is a colleague to any who aligns themselves with the Lord. Godly friends are invaluable. To have associates who are as devoted to Jehovah as you are (or more so) is of great encouragement. And to have fellow laborers in the work of the Lord may not make the job any less complicated, but it does make it far more sustainable (cf. 1 Cor. 3:6-11). Isolation is the demise of all things. An animal cut off from the herd is easy pickings. A bridge lacking proper support will collapse. Likewise, distance yourself from the community of God, and it will not take long before the fires of your faith begin to wane (cf. Heb. 10:25).
- Vs. 64      God's "steadfast love," that is, His *khesed*, is everywhere ("the earth is full"). To find evidence that God exists and that God loves us is as simple as looking outside. His love for us is, quite literally, cosmic.<sup>6</sup> But, as we know, it is rarely ever that simple. We are so thick that even with this massive deposit of truth we call our world standing right before our very own eyes, we will not comprehend its implication if we do not have God himself "teach" us His "statues." We need Him to connect the dots for us. Once he does, it is hard to ignore the message of love written in the skies, echoed throughout the hills, and felt in the warmth of the sun (cf. Ps. 19:1-6; Rom. 1:20).

"What's your takeaway?"

My takeaway this evening is this: when I feel as if I am in the "middle of the night," when I feel like I'm discouraged and there seems to be no end in sight, I not only need to pray, I also need to praise. I need to remind the shadows within and without that God is greater.

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<sup>5</sup> Goldingay, John, *Psalms*, Volume 3: Psalms 90-150, The Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 3:406.

<sup>6</sup> Longman, Tremper, III, & David E. Garland, *Psalms*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Revised Edition, Volume 5, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2008), p. 870.

## VIDEO DESCRIPTION

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TITLE: Heth

TEXT: Psalm 119:57-64

Pastor's manuscript can be found here: <https://docdro.id/DX1qIM3>