

August 4, 2021 | Wednesday Night Live | Psalm 119: Learning the Letters of Scripture

Week 12 | Psalm 119:81-88 | Kalph

Today, we move on to the eleventh letter of the Hebrew alphabet, Kalph. 

Surgeon general's warning, this stanza isn't very pleasant. So far, mention of some type of persecution can be found throughout the last five stanzas from Vav to Yodh. In this stanza, the topic of suffering unjustly is no mere passing thought but a prominent theme. Our Psalmist is under extreme duress. And the pressure he is experiencing will bring him to his very limit. By his own estimations, he is, quite literally, finished. Thankfully, while this is a sobering stanza is not without some encouragement. Although in the midst of dire circumstances, our sojourner utilizes all eight synonyms for Scripture as he expresses his total reliance and obedience to them. In the end, they will act like stepping stones leading the Psalmist to recollect on God's affection. It seems that the light of God's unfailing love for His people shines brightest in the dark.

READ: Psalm 119:81-88 (ESV)

Kalph

⁸¹ My soul longs for your salvation; I hope in your word.

⁸² My eyes long for your promise; I ask, "When will you comfort me?"

⁸³ For I have become like a wineskin in the smoke, yet I have not forgotten your statutes.

⁸⁴ How long must your servant endure? When will you judge those who persecute me?

⁸⁵ The insolent have dug pitfalls for me; they do not live according to your law.

⁸⁶ All your commandments are sure; they persecute me with falsehood; help me!

⁸⁷ They have almost made an end of me on earth, but I have not forsaken your precepts.

⁸⁸ In your steadfast love give me life, that I may keep the testimonies of your mouth.

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

Vs. 81 The writer of Proverbs says, "Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life." (Pro. 13:12) The point being that the longer we go without seeing a promise fulfilled, the more likely we are to lose faith. Internally, our Psalmist is in such a place. We see this in the use of the Hebrew word *kâlâh*, which is translated as "long" in our passage but is most

often translated as something like “consumed,” “end,” or “finished” (cf. Gen. 2:1-2, 21:15, 41:30; Job 7:6; Ps. 18:37; 31:10; 69:3). The idea being that his “soul” is being stretched to its absolute limit while he is waiting on God to rescue him. Like cloth that is pulled too tight, our wanderer is about to be ripped in two. He’s been strong before, but his mental fortitude has begun to buckle. He is longing to see deliverance (“salvation”), but his liberation has yet to come. Despite this, where does our sojourner turn? God's "word." Though he is pulled to his breaking point and is sick from all the waiting, he rests his "hope" in what God has said. Our writer knows that God's timing is not our timing. If he must wait, he will do so for however long it takes. This singer/songwriter will beat back the shadows of doubt with the light of Scripture.

Vs. 82 Once again, we see the Psalmist uses the word *kâlâh*. This time, however, he speaks about his “eyes” growing weary to the point of failure (“long”) rather than his soul (v. 81). Here, our wanderer is looking for God’s “promise;” that is, he is looking for the evidence that the Lord is still in the business of fulfilling the vows He’s made. The Psalmist then proposes a question: “When will you comfort me?” To see a promised fulfilled is of great comfort to our sojourner. How much consolation is found when God finally keeps His word? But the Psalmist's patience is running thin, and so he asks "when." He has strained his eye looking to see if God will uphold His oaths, and he is unsure how much longer he'll be able to search the horizon for those promises.

Vs. 83 A satisfying explanation for the “wineskin in the smoke” analogy eludes us.¹ No doubt, when the words were penned, they would've been understood by its initial readers. However, given the use of similar imagery elsewhere, it appears as if the Psalmist is saying that his appearance has become gaunt and skeletal (cf. Lam. 4:8).² So much so that his countenance resembles that of a burnt or charred container. The point he may be making is that he’s been blackened by the proverbial soot of life, and so our wanderer feels as if

¹ Goldingay, John, *Psalms*, Volume 3: Psalms 90-150, The Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 3:412-413.

² Longman, Tremper, III, & David E. Garland, *Psalms*, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Revised Edition, Volume 5, (Grand Rapids; Zondervan Academic, 2008), p. 875.

he's withering way like some shriveled-up husk.³ Like a dried-up old wineskin, he is long past his expiration date.⁴ Yet despite his troublesome state, our wanderer is not totally empty. Though he is but a shell of his former self, he has retained ("not forgotten") God's "statues." The Psalmist may feel as if he is at the end and may have even given up hope, but he still chooses to remember God's word.

Vs. 84 For one who is seemingly not long for this world, the Psalmist appeals to God once more about His divine timetable. As he did in verse 82, he wants to know the precise scheduling for God's retribution. Apparently, the cause of our wanderer's troubles is those that "persecute" him. In his own estimations, the Psalmist has "endured" quite enough already. What's more, he has not suffered for any other reason than that he has made himself a "servant" of the Highest. Meaning, our wanderer's association with the Lord is the very cause of his trouble. Thus, it stands to reason, if the Psalmist suffers because he has identified himself with the Lord, then the Lord Himself ought to become an advocate ("judge") on the Psalmist's behalf.

Vs. 85 Carrying on the thought of the previous verse, the Psalmist then moves to explain how those who have persecuted him have laid traps for him as if he were some wild animal ("dug pitfalls for me"). Using deceit, deception, and dishonesty these willful pursuers ("the insolent") have already defamed his character (cf. vs. 69). And now they seek to take his life also. They do this because "they do not live according to [God's] law." They live according to their own laws. Laws that give them license to pursue and kill an innocent man like our Psalmist. And by hunting our righteous wanderer, they have shown by their deeds that they do not abide by the commandments of God. Had they brought their lives in accordance with God's word, they would not confuse friend for foe. Little did they know that the Psalmist would've been a valued ally if only they had the same love and admiration for God that he does (cf. vs. 63).

³ Allen, Leslie C., *Psalm 101-150*, The World Biblical Commentary, Volume 21, (Nashville, TN; Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2002), p. 189.

⁴ Wilcock, Michael, *The Message of Psalms 73-150*, The Bible Speaks Today, (Downers Grove, Ill; InterVarsity Press Academic, 2001), p. 205.

- Vs. 86 God's "commandants" are reliable ("sure"). As surely as the sun sets in the west and rises in the east every day, God's word will not fail. Yet, our Psalmist has experienced great pain and heartache simply because he has obeyed God's precepts. Why should he suffer for being obedient? God's word is trustworthy and dependable. And while far from perfect, the Psalmist has not forsaken that righteous path. So why do these enemies continue to torment ("persecuted") him with lies ("falsehood")? How can two seemingly opposite realities coexist? Obedience should lead to more blessings, not more heartache. From the Psalmist's perspective, this harassment cannot be allowed to continue. The incongruity of his situation is simply too much for him to bear, and so the Psalmist can only cry out for "help." Like a child who cannot grasp the reasons for his circumstances, the Psalmist looks to his heavenly Father for support. He knows that he cannot remedy these unfavorable conditions on his own. Only God can give him the relief and comfort he so desperately needs.
- Vs. 87 We return once again to the sad state of our weary wanderer. With their falsehoods and pitfalls, his pursuers have all but "made an end" of him. This phrase is another use of the Hebrew word *kâlâh* (cf. vs. 81, 82). His enemies have made his life so unmanageable that the Psalmist is essentially finished. He can go on no more. Yet, though the end draws near, our sojourner does not abandon ("forsake") God's "precepts." He is faithful, even to the very end. What little time he has left will be marshaled to serve God.
- Vs. 88 It is fitting that all the instances of trouble throughout this stanza should be balanced by a special mention of God's "steadfast love." Meaning that despite our Psalmist's unenviable state, there is still hope that Yahweh's *khesêd* can give him "life" (cf. vs. 41, 64, 76). And why not? After all, God turns lost causes into victories (cf. Esth. 9), and He transforms dry bones into living creatures (cf. Ezk. 37). What sort of enemy can stand before the power of God's love? What's more, our wanderer not only invokes God's loyal love in his rationale for rescue, but he then surmises that should God deliver the Psalmist, he will be free once more to obey ("keep") the Lord's "testimonies." Essentially, his line of reasoning is that it benefits God's glory for God to comply with his request. "How else will I continue to obey," our sojourner contends, "if you do not give me life? A dead man cannot obey."

Even in his request for revitalization, the Psalmist is only concerned with the Lord's reputation.

"What's your takeaway?"

My takeaway this evening is this: My takeaway this evening is this: when he didn't have any good answers, the Psalmist asked for help. He felt as if he had nowhere to go. He felt like he was being hurt even though he had done nothing wrong. He was in a confusing situation that he could not wrap his mind around. And at that moment, he simply cried out for help. Perplexed by what he saw around him, his response was to run to God and not away from God.

VIDEO DESCRIPTION

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Pastor's manuscript can be found here: