

## October 6, 2021 | Wednesday Night Live | Psalm 119: Learning the Letters of Scripture

Week 18 | Psalm 119:129-136 | Pe

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

Like Ayin before, the Pe stanza is a melting pot of many key ideas and themes already explored earlier in Psalm 119. Ironically, it seems as if the Psalmist is repeating the idea of repetition itself to highlight its importance. Nevertheless, while nothing will surprise us in these eight verses, they touch on topics that all need to be reminded of. After all, our minds tend to forget the fundamentals if left to their own devices.

**READ:** Psalm 119:129-136 (ESV)

### Pe

<sup>129</sup> Your testimonies are wonderful; therefore my soul keeps them.

<sup>130</sup> The unfolding of your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple.

<sup>131</sup> I open my mouth and pant, because I long for your commandments.

<sup>132</sup> Turn to me and be gracious to me, as is your way with those who love your name.

<sup>133</sup> Keep steady my steps according to your promise, and let no iniquity get dominion over me.

<sup>134</sup> Redeem me from man's oppression, that I may keep your precepts.

<sup>135</sup> Make your face shine upon your servant, and teach me your statutes.

<sup>136</sup> My eyes shed streams of tears, because people do not keep your law.

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

Vs. 129      The stanza begins with the Psalmist declaring that God's word ("testimonies") is "wonderful." Here, he uses the noun cognate (*pele*) of the Hebrew verb *pala'*. This is not a new term as he already used it in vs. 18 and 27.<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, this term shows up several times throughout Scripture, and it is the closest parallel we have to our idea of miracles.<sup>2</sup> Of note, the word appears after Sarah laughed at the thought of bearing a son in her old

<sup>1</sup> Goldingay, John, *Psalms*, Volume 3: Psalms 90-150, The Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 3:429.

<sup>2</sup> DeClaisé-Walford, Nancy, Rolf A. Jacobson, Beth LaNeel Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), p. 884.

age. God responds to Sarah's faithless snicker by saying, "Is anything too hard [*pala'*] for the Lord?" (Gen. 18:14) The term shows up again in two key places during the Exodus narrative. In Ex. 3:20, God, speaking to Moses from the burning bush, said, "I will stretch out my hand and strike Egypt with all the wonders [*pala'*] that I will do in it; after that he will let you go." Then, right after the golden calf incident, God renews His covenant with Israel and says in Ex. 34:10, "Before all your people I will do marvels [*pala'*], such as have not been created in all the earth or in any nation. And all the people among whom you are shall see the work of the Lord, for it is an awesome thing that I will do with you." For our sojourner, reading the Scriptures responsibly invokes wonder, marvel, and amazement. This, in turn, fuels his obedience ("keeps them"). And this obedience is not with mere lip-service; instead, the Psalmist's "soul" is brought in awe-inspired submissiveness to the one true God.

Vs. 130      The Hebrew term *paythakh* ("unfolding") refers to something that is opened or revealed. The Psalmist may have had in mind a scroll that had to be literally unrolled to read God's word.<sup>3</sup> Whatever the inspiration may be, the point our wanderer is trying to make is that God's "words," when unfolded, brings enlightenment ("light"). Meaning, our sojourner's mind would've been left alone in the darkness of his own imagination if not for the illuminating work of the Scriptures. Every time he opens up his Bible, the Psalmist's heart burns within him as God's word decodes his life (cf. Lu 24:32).<sup>4</sup> Like a flower in full bloom, God's word has brought with it a sweet-smelling scent that has brightened the Psalmist's day. Without the Bible, his life would be a dull and dismal thing. But with the Scriptures, the writer of Psalm 119 has a lively and luminous existence. What's more, God's word isn't only for the intelligent but also for the unintelligent ("simple"). Anyone who may lack "understanding" need only come to the boundless fount of Scripture to have their mental thirst quenched ("imparts"). Indeed, true intelligence is not measured by how high one scores on an I.Q. test, but by how well one knows God's word.

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<sup>3</sup>      Goldingay (2008), 3:429.

<sup>4</sup>      Kidner, Derek, *Psalm 73-150*, The Kidner Classic Commentaries, (Downers Grove, ILL: Inter-Varsity Press Academic, Reprint, 2008), p. 463-464.

- Vs. 131      The Psalmist is so thirsty for God's "commandments" that he cannot help but gasp for air ("pant") as he searches for those living waters (cf. Ps. 42:1). In fact, his mouth is "open" as he longingly ("long") seeks after God. After all, nothing else in this life can satisfy his dehydrated soul quite like God's word (cf. Isa. 44:3). Those divine words are like a torrential downpour on a parched and cracked wasteland. And our sojourner aches to be refreshed along his weary wandering.
- Vs. 132      The Psalmist wants God's approval. This is what he meant when he said that he wanted God to "turn" to him and be "gracious" with him. Rather than turn away from him in condemnation, our wanderer would have God turn to him in commendation. This seems bold, but it is in keeping with what God has said. After all, the Lord made it clear that those who love Him will be abundantly and exceedingly blessed by Him (cf. Deut. 7:12-16). Who better to receive a blessing than the Psalmist? Our sojourner has nothing but devotion ("love") for the "name" of God. It is in that name that he finds his identity and passion. What's more, he is so driven by his allegiance to that name that little to nothing will keep him from his duty. And even though he may live a life of hardship due to his fondness for God's name, it is still a life worth living.
- Vs. 133      Every man is responsible for his own path. The Psalmist has already admitted that he not only turns his "feet" toward God's "testimonies" (vs. 59), he also turns his "feet" away "from every evil way" (vs. 101). However, our wanderer also knows that his commitment will falter if he doesn't receive divine aid. This is why we find the Psalmist asking God to "steady" his "steps." He knows that he will eventually stumble unless God sets his "feet upon a rock" (Ps. 40:2). And while, yes, our wanderer's enemies are hell-bent on tripping him up, it seems, at least in this verse, he may be the sole cause for his own stumbling. After all, he doesn't speak of a literal enemy, but an "iniquity" that seeks to dominate ("dominion over me") him. Ever-transparent, our wanderer admits that he is just as likely to fall to the demons from within as he is to the demons from without. A pet vice traps a man as efficiently as Lucifer himself; better, in fact, depending on the bad habit. In these scenarios, the Psalmist is more or less asking God to secure his footing not because he's about to be ensnared by some adversary but because he is about to willingly entangle *himself*. Sin, as Genesis 4:7 tells us,

crouches at our door and desires to rule us.<sup>5</sup> And unless God delivers us, it will have its way with us.

- Vs. 134      “Redeem” is the Hebrew term *pada*, and it is often used when a person or thing is sold or released from servitude (cf. Ex. 13:13, 21:8; Lev. 27:27). Interestingly, God used this terminology throughout Deuteronomy in reference to how He had “redeemed” Israel from the “house of bondage” in Egypt (cf. Deut. 7:8; 9:26, 13:5; 15:15; 24:18). Thus, the Psalmist’s request that God “redeem” him from “man’s oppression” is in keeping with *pada*’s usage throughout the O.T. Our sojourner has been under a severe yoke of subjugation, and he is ready to be released from his life-long slavery. So much so that these oppressive chains keep him from obeying (“keep”) God’s “precepts.” Even in asking for liberation, the Psalmist is motivated by his desire to be faithful to God’s word and not simple freedom.
- Vs. 135      If this verse sounds familiar, the Psalmist used similar imagery in verse 132. However, it could also be because the phrase, “make your face shine upon your servant,” is almost a direct quote from a somewhat famous passage in the O.T. Aaron—the first high priest of Israel—was told to bless Israel by saying, “...the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.” (Num. 6:24-26)<sup>6</sup> Thus, to have someone’s “face to shine upon you” meant that person favored you. In other words, the Psalmist doesn’t want the frown of God; instead, he wants the smile of God. He wants God to be proud of who he is and what he is doing with his life. Yet, only when our wanderer has grown in his knowledge of the Scriptures will he find God smiling down upon him. So, he asks, for the *tenth* time, “teach me your statutes” (cf. vs. 12, 26, 29, 33, 64, 66, 68, 108, 124). It appears the Psalmist ascribes to the philosophy that the “squeaky wheel gets the grease” as when it comes to his tutelage, he will ask over and over again for God to be his teacher until God finally relents (cf. Lu. 11:5-12; 18:1-7). And, if I may paraphrase Ja. 5:16, the writer of Psalm 119 is proof that “the prayers of a fervently persistent man avail much.” It is doubtful he would’ve been able to write the longest single

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<sup>5</sup> Allen, Leslie C., *Psalm 101-150*, The World Biblical Commentary, Volume 21, (Nashville, TN; Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2002), p. 191.

<sup>6</sup> Wilcock, Michael, *The Message of Psalms 73-150*, The Bible Speaks Today, (Downers Grove, Ill; InterVarsity Press Academic, 2001), p. 213.

chapter in all of the Bible, whose singular topic is on the supremacy of Scripture if God hadn't granted his oft-repeated request.

Vs. 136 To find unending joy in the Scripture, paradoxically, means one will also find endless sorrow in the world. This is because the world hates the very thing that brings such joy: the Scriptures. Thus, using some hyperbole, the Psalmist says that he sheds “streams of tears” over the disobedience around him. In fact, the Hebrew term for “streams” (*pehleg*) can be literally translated as “irrigation canals.”<sup>7</sup> Meaning, it is as if the Mississippi finds its source in the eyes of our wanderer rather than Lake Itasca in M.N. Mourning because the disobedience around us is as much an indicator of our dedication to God as finding merriment in His word.

"What's your takeaway?"

My takeaway this evening is this: the "old man" inside me is as much a threat as the darkness outside of me. The old excuse that "the devil made me do it" has never once been valid. Even in the Garden of Eden, mankind fell because they failed to obey, not because they were tempted by the devil. That's part of it. But man is responsible for his own failures even if temptation came through the serpent in the guise of his wife (cf. 1 Tim. 2:14).

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VanGemenen, William A., *Psalms*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Revised Edition, Volume 5, Editors, Tremper Longman, III & David E. Garland, (Grand Rapids; Zondervan Academic, 2008), p. 883.

## VIDEO DESCRIPTION

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TITLE: Pe

TEXT: Psalm 119:129-136

Pastor's manuscript can be found here: