

## November 3, 2021 | Wednesday Night Live | Psalm 119: Learning the Letters of Scripture

Week 22 | Psalm 119:161-168 | Sin & Shin

Today, we move on to the twenty-first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, Sin & Shin. **<Insert Picture>**

In this second to the last stanza, the psalm-singer lets his emotions spill onto the page. First, he's awed, and then he not only rejoices but praises God no less than seven times a day. After that, the Psalmist speaks about the "great peace" accompanying his thrice-mentioned love for God's Word (cf. 163, 165, 167). It seems as the closing of this great chapter draws near, our wanderer cannot contain himself any longer. If there is one thing that he would like for his readers to know, it is his passion for the things of God.

**READ:** Psalm 119:161-168 (ESV)

### Sin and Shin

<sup>161</sup> Princes persecute me without cause, but my heart stands in awe of your words.

<sup>162</sup> I rejoice at your word like one who finds great spoil.

<sup>163</sup> I hate and abhor falsehood, but I love your law.

<sup>164</sup> Seven times a day, I praise you for your righteous rules.

<sup>165</sup> Great peace have those who love your law; nothing can make them stumble.

<sup>166</sup> I hope for your salvation, O Lord, and I do your commandments.

<sup>167</sup> My soul keeps your testimonies; I love them exceedingly.

<sup>168</sup> I keep your precepts and testimonies, for all my ways are before you.

What are the principles that the Psalmist is trying to instill in this twenty-first stanza?

Vs. 161      In verse 23, “princes” sat on their thrones “plotting” to destroy our wanderer. Here, it seems, those same “princes” have gone through with their devilish schemes and have illegally (“without cause”) prosecuted (“persecute”) the Psalmist. Yet, even though he stands wrongfully accused before this kangaroo court, his “heart stands in awe” of God’s “words.” Interestingly, the Hebrew word translated “awe” can also just easily be

translated “tremble” (cf. vs. 120; Job. 4:14; Isa. 19:16).<sup>1</sup> Thus, our sojourner does not quiver before these faulty judges; instead, he shudders beneath the weight of God's Word. We should rightfully be ashamed when confronted with our own wrongdoing (cf. 1 Pet. 4:14-16). If those closest to us come and show concern for how we've behaved, we ought to acknowledge our mistakes and make every effort to set upright that which has been upended (cf. Mat. 18:15-20). However, should we ever be wrongfully accused of evil due to our association with Christ, may we hold our heads up high and, as our wanderer put it, may our hearts stand in awe of God's Word. After all, Jesus himself rounded out the famous beatitudes in Matthew 5:10-12 by saying, “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” Builders of the Kingdom of Heaven know to expect only persecution and never praise in this life. Prophets, like Daniel, Jeremiah, and Elijah, all suffered great injustices because they stood on the shoulders of God's promises. Like this very psalm-singer, poets waxed eloquently with their descriptions of how they were hated and cast out simply because they loved the Scriptures. Thus, it is a blessed reminder that we are in good company whenever we are afflicted because of our association with God. The marks of a true disciple have always been the stripes of persecution.

Vs. 162 Well-known are the sayings, “history is written by the victors” and “to the victor go the spoils.” Both maxims highlight the fortunes that await those who are triumphant in battle. Yet, we often forget that history is rife with instances of victors behaving themselves like villains. And, not surprisingly, the Scriptures have more than a few such examples (cf. 1 Sam. 14, 15). For instance, in Joshua 7, we’re told about a man named Achan, who, after the fall of Jericho, took for himself a pretty little fortune: an expensive Babylonian cloak, 6 pounds of silver, and over a pound of gold (cf. Josh. 7:21). Typically, there wasn't anything wrong with this practice; however, the Israelites were expressly forbidden to do what was customary as the

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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. 217.

treasures of Jericho were to be dedicated, *en masse*, to the Lord (cf. Josh. 6:19, 24). Sadly, Achan's greed-fueled-transgression was only discovered after the Israelites suffered a resounding defeat against an enemy they should've easily outmatched (cf. Josh. 7:2-5). If only he had "rejoiced" at God's "word" and obeyed it like our Psalmist rather than relish in the plunder of riches (cf. Isa. 9:3).<sup>2</sup> After all, the Scriptures are a treasure-trove ("great spoil") packed full of principles and wisdom worth more than all the gold, silver, and precious stones this world has to offer.

- Vs. 163 This is the first of three times the Psalmist expresses his "love" for God's Word in this stanza alone (cf. vs. 165, 167). In this instance, what defines our wanderer's affection for the Bible isn't something that he is for, but, rather, something that he's against: "falsehood." Interestingly, he's already said that he "hates" every "false way" in verse 104; but here, he not only expresses his hatred for anything that goes against the truth, he also says that he "abhors" it. In using such a term, he's doubling down on the distaste and disgust he feels for any untruths he encounters (cf. vs. 158). After all, why shouldn't he feel such things? These are also the feelings that our Lord experiences when he looks at the very same things: "You destroy those who speak lies; the Lord abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man." (Ps. 5:6) However, though the Bible is clear on its aversion to dishonesty, isn't it curious that we have a tendency to minimize the seriousness of lying? Depending on the lie, rather than see it for what it is, we might say its nothing more than a "little white lie," or it's a "half-truth," or that it "stretches the truth," or, if we're caught, we deflect by saying something like, "it's nothing more than a harmless exaggeration." But any time we diminish or downplay the egregious nature of distorting the truth, we are acting far more like the father of lies (Jn. 8:44) than the Father of Lights (Ja. 1:17). Deception, disinformation, and dissimulation are the broad brushstrokes of one seeking to manipulate others rather than glorify God.
- Vs. 164 In verses 147 and 148, the Psalmist told us that he has a habit of reading the Scriptures well before dawn and meditating on God's Word well into the night. Now, however, our psalm-singer reveals that he's not only beginning and ending his day by reading the Bible, but he's also worshiping God

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<sup>2</sup> VanGemeren, 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. 888.

("praise") "seven times a day"! Whether or not this is hyperbole is hard to say. Even though the number seven is symbolic of perfection, and thus we might assume he's exaggerating a little, our sojourner has written the longest chapter in the Bible revolving around only one idea: the supremacy of Scripture. God's Word is the sole driving force behind every word and verse. At this point in our study, there is little doubt that the Psalmist is obsessed with these blessed pages. So, the idea of someone praising God seven times throughout their day is perfectly in line with what we know about this particular follower of God. In fact, it's possible, if we had the same fixation with the Scriptures as the Psalmist, we too might read that line as a simple expression of fact rather than some literary embellishment.

Vs. 165      Considering all the trials and tribulations that our wanderer has experienced, it's remarkable that he now mentions *shalom* ("peace") for the first and last time. Obviously, we must assume he means peace in the sense of psychological wellbeing rather than a lack of conflict in the physical world. If so, he is making a great point that even though he is in the midst of chaos externally, internally, he feels a calmness and tranquility. Interestingly, our psalm-singer's words are reminiscent of Isaiah's prophecy about the New Jerusalem. In that place, God not only swallows "up death forever," but He also wipes "away tears from all faces." (Isa. 25:7-8) And this grand climax to God's redemptive story is such a powerful promise that Isaiah eventually explains, not unlike our Psalmist here, "You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you." (Isa. 26:3) A mind that is "stayed" on the promises of God can weather the biggest storms. This is why the psalm-singer explains that a big part of why he is so composed is because he has nothing but "love" for God's "law." The kind of peace he has been given comes straight from the pages of the Bible. What's more, it is not only the source of his *shalom*, but it is the source of his "great" *shalom*. Meaning, his raging heart is quieted in a great sea of stillness found only in the Scripture. In fact, he is so confident in the Bible that he goes so far as to say, "nothing can make them [him] stumble." Thus, it would seem an adoration for the Word can not only calm a chattering heart, but it can also steady uneasy steps and still shaking knees (cf. vs. 133).

- Vs. 166      The Psalmist's "hope" for God's coming deliverance ("salvation") is analogous to his obedience ("I do") to God's "commandment." They are two sides of the same coin. If we were to ask him which motivated which, he would not be able to say. Knowing that God will someday save him from his present circumstance no doubt encourages him to submit to God in whatever circumstance he finds himself. However, living a life per God's promises has a way of nurturing a living hope in those very same promises. We obey because we have a hope of a future vindication. And we hope because our obedience has shown us, already, that our faith is not in vain.
- Vs. 167      This is not only the last of three times that the Psalmist talks about his love for God's Word in this stanza, but it is also the last time he will speak of it in all of Psalm 119. Interestingly, in total, he's mentioned his adoration for the Scriptures 11 times (cf. vs. 47, 48, 97, 113, 119, 127, 140, 159, 163, 165). And, in this verse, it is because of his love for the Scriptures that his *nephesh* ("soul") "keeps" the Lord's commandments ("testimonies"). During his farewell discourse with his disciples in the upper room, Jesus made this very same point when he said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments." (Jn. 14:15) Our wanderer knows that his affection for God is best shown when he obeys God's Word. Failing to do so repeatedly casts doubt on whether or not someone truly loves God. After all, if we love someone, we should do everything in our power to reassure that person of our fondness for them. A child who is unruly or rebellious toward their parents is a child who lacks a proper understanding of what true love is. We show, by our actions, what we believe in our hearts. If we have a love for God, that love will propel us to obey. If our love for God is wanting, it is unlikely we will ever live according to his Word.
- Vs. 168      The Psalmist needs no other witness than God to vouch for his obedience because he knows that all his "ways are before" the Lord. To know that God is watching is an ideal incentive for our wanderer to "keep" God's "precepts and testimonies." Thus, our sojourner "has acted out of an awareness of the watchful eye of God."<sup>3</sup> Just as a child will be more prone to obey while in the presence of a parent, this psalm-singer understands that there is no place he can go where God is not there (cf. Ps. 139:7-12). Or, as Job

<sup>3</sup>

Allen, Leslie C., *Psalm 101-150*, The World Biblical Commentary, Volume 21, (Nashville, TN; Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2002), p. 191-192.

observed about God, "Does not he see my ways and number all my steps?" (Job 31:4; cf. Pro. 5:20-21; Heb. 4:13) After all, Jehovah is the Omniscient One, the ever-present God of the universe, and the Great I Am (cf. Ex. 3:14; Jhn. 4:26; 6:20; 8:24, 28, 58; 13:19; 18:5-6). Can anything be hidden from He who sees all things?

"What's your takeaway?"

My takeaway this evening is this: we can have tranquility amid hostility. Even to the apostle Paul, this fact didn't make sense, for he said in Philippians 4:7, "And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Peace stands at the doorway of our minds protecting us. Like a bouncer, it will not allow anything to get through.

## VIDEO DESCRIPTION

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Pastor's manuscript can be found here: