



*Good News*  
**Bible Reading Program**

A free educational service provided by the United Church of God, *an International Association*

— January 2006 —

DATE	READING TOPIC	SCRIPTURES
1-6 Jan	108) Confident prayer to God for victory over enemies; 109) Lamenting prayer for help against enemies; 110) The coming reign of David's Lord, the Melchizedek Priest-King	Psalms 108–110
7-17 Jan	111) Praise to God for His righteousness and faithfulness; 112) Blessings on the righteous; 113) Praising God for His majesty and for caring for His creation; 114) God's powerful presence in delivering Israel; 115) The nations trust in useless idols; Israel should trust in the true God	Psalms 111–115
18-23 Jan	116) Vowing service to God in thanks for His deliverance; 117) Let all peoples praise God for His merciful love and truth; 118) Praise to God for His everlasting merciful love and prayer for salvation	Psalms 116–118
24-25 Jan	119: <i>Aleph–He</i> ) Meditating on and living by God's testimonies	Psalms 119:1-40
26-27 Jan	119: <i>Waw–Kaph</i> ) Trusting in God's Word, praying for His mercy and salvation	Psalms 119:41-88
28-29 Jan	119: <i>Lamed–Ayin</i> ) Loving God's law and seeking His salvation	Psalms 119:89-128
30-31 Jan	119: <i>Pe–Tau</i> ) Following God's commandments and praying for help and deliverance	Psalms 119:129-176

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<b>Highlights to Think About From This Month's Reading</b>
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**“Save With Your Right Hand” (Psalms 108–110)****January 1-6**

**Psalm 108** is titled a psalm of David, being a combination, with slight modifications, of parts of two other psalms of David, Psalms 57 and 60 (compare 57:7-11 with 108:1-5 and 60:5-12 with 108:6-13). As their superscriptions attest, Psalm 57 was written when David and his men hid from Saul in the cave near the desert oasis of En Gedi, and Psalm 60 was written when David fought against the forces of Mesopotamia and Syria. We earlier read Psalm 108 in the Bible Reading Program in conjunction with the account of the latter episode (see the Bible Reading Program comments on 2 Samuel 10; 1 Chronicles 19; Psalm 60; Psalm 108; Psalm 83). It would be helpful here to review the Bible Reading Program's Psalms section comments on Psalm 57 and Psalm 60.

The first part of Psalm 108 (verses 1-5), the part also found in Psalm 57:7-11, praises the extensiveness of God's *hesed*—His steadfast covenant love and mercy. In fact, where Psalm 57:10 said it reaches to the heavens, Psalm 108:4, slightly reworded, says it is great *above* the heavens. Based on this pervasiveness of God's covenant faithfulness, the latter part of Psalm 108 (verses 6-13), the part taken from Psalm 60:5-12, is a prayer for deliverance from and help against Israel's national enemies. While the later song could have been composed shortly after the former, so that the circumstances described still existed, it may be that the later composition was *much* later—so that circumstances were completely different yet the same general need for God's intervention was present (evidently after a period of things not going so well). As in Psalm 60, the song is adamant in proclaiming that only through God can we attain ultimate victory.

In **Psalm 109**, often referred to as an imprecatory (cursing) psalm of lament, David calls on God to judge and punish his wicked enemies who have attacked him with lies and hateful accusations (verses 1-4). Their fabrications are baseless, “without a cause” (verse 3), and they have betrayed David, returning, he says, “evil for good, and hatred for my love” (verse 5).

In its opening and closing, David refers to his enemies in the plural. Yet in verses 6-19, the psalm refers to a singular individual. Some take these verses to be David's quoting of his enemies regarding himself, yet it more likely seems that David is the one speaking here—referring to a primary antagonist, evidently one holding an office of responsibility (see verse 8).

In very strong language, David calls on God to settle accounts (verses 6-20). *The Nelson Study Bible* states: “Here the psalm takes a decidedly negative tone. The description of the wife of the enemy becoming an impoverished widow and the children becoming beggars [verses 9-12] seems particularly harsh. However, the psalmist directs these strong requests to the Lord; he does not actually take the sword into his own hand. He may feel compelled to vent his anger in words, but the psalmist understands that vengeance itself belongs to the Lord” (note on verses 6-8).

Still, we might wonder why David would pray for calamity on innocent family members. Of course, they may not have been innocent at all. We do not know the exact circumstances here. It may be that the children mentioned were older—and that David understood them and the wife to be fully supportive of the wicked man's attacks on him. They may even have been participants in slandering him. The enemy's parents may also have been involved (see verse 14).

Moreover we should consider, as the *Zondervan NIV Study Bible* says, that “the close identity of a man with his children and of children with their parents, resulting from the tightly bonded unity of the three- or four-generation households of that ancient society, is alien to the modern reader, whose sense of self is highly individualistic.... That deep, profoundly human bond accounts [along with passed down behavior and consequences] for the ancient legal principle of ‘punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation’ (see Ex 20:5...)” (note on Psalm 109:12). Furthermore, since it was considered that “a man lived on in his children...the focus of judgment [when mentioning the cutting off of descendants] remains on the false accuser (see 21:10; 37:28)” (note on 109:13).

It also seems that the curses David calls for are ones his accusers have pronounced against him—that he is merely praying for their curses against him to be turned back on themselves (compare verses 17-20). The psalm thus forms an “appeal for judicial redress—that the Lord will deal with them in accordance

with their malicious intent against him, matching punishment with crime” (*Zondervan*, note on verses 6-15).

Indeed, we must also remember that David was Israel’s king and judge as well as an inspired prophet of God. His song here, though no doubt personally heartfelt, was more importantly a declaration of God’s judgment rather than a model for us on how to pray about enemies. This is what God’s law decreed concerning false accusers: “If the witness is a false witness, who has testified falsely against his brother, *then you shall do to him as he thought to have done to his brother*; so you shall put away the evil from among you. And those who remain shall hear and fear, and hereafter they shall not again commit such evil among you. Your eye shall not pity: life shall be for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot” (Deuteronomy 19:18-21).

As for how we are to pray about our enemies, Jesus gave us this instruction: “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you” (Luke 6:27-28). Of course, this does not preclude asking God to deal with them with “tough love” if they persist in harm—as this would ultimately be for their own good.

Demonstrating Psalm 109’s prophetic aspect, the apostle Peter later cited the end of verse 8, “Let another take his office,” in regard to selecting a replacement for Judas Iscariot among the 12 apostles after his betrayal of Jesus Christ (Acts 1:20). This does not necessarily mean that all of Psalm 109 is applicable to Judas. For instance, we have no other evidence that he had a wife and children—though it is possible that he did. The important point is that the judgment decreed on a betrayer of God’s anointed king would, in an even greater sense, fit Judas. Judas betrayed Jesus, the King of Kings, returning evil for the love that Christ had shown him.

Psalm 109:14-15 should not be understood as a prayer for removing all possibility of repentance and forgiveness for David’s enemy and the enemy’s family. Rather, David is asking that God not forget what they did to him so as to ensure their punishment. Yet David himself would have accepted an enemy’s repentance—just as God accepted David’s own repentance. Some, it should be noted, see the verses here as indicating that Judas cannot be forgiven for his sin upon repentance in the second resurrection. These verses indicate no such thing.

Finally, David describes the effect of the enemies’ attacks on him (verses 22-25)—foreshadowing what Jesus Himself would experience. And he prays for God to powerfully intervene in a way that would make it clear to the enemies that God was doing so (verses 26-27). David closes with praise, confident in God’s coming intervention on his behalf (verse 31)—just as God will intervene for all of His people suffering such assaults and persecution from others.

**Psalm 110** is a royal psalm of David that affirms the divinity of the Messiah. Note that the psalm begins in verse 1 with “the LORD”—i.e., *YHWH* (He Is Who He Is, the Eternal God)—giving subordinate regal rule at His right hand to another whom David refers to as “my Lord” (*Adoni*, meaning “Master”). David was the king of Israel. Who, if not God, was over him as his Lord?

Prior to Jesus’ day, the Jews viewed this psalm as messianic. They saw David here looking to the future Messiah or Christ, the anointed King who would establish the Kingdom of God over all nations. Yet other passages showed that the Messiah would be a descendant of David, which was seemingly problematic for Psalm 110. Jesus used these points in confounding the Pharisees. Note this exchange from Matthew 22 (which gives evidence of the Jewish messianic interpretation of Psalm 110 and confirms David as the psalm’s author):

“While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, saying, ‘What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?’

“They said to Him, ‘The Son of David.’

“He said to them, ‘How then does David call Him ‘Lord,’ saying [in Psalm 110:1]: ‘The LORD said to my Lord, sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool’? If David then calls Him ‘Lord,’ how is He his Son?’ And no one was able to answer Him a word, nor from that day on did anyone dare to question Him anymore” (verses 41-46; compare Mark 12:35-37; Luke 20:41-44).

It was unheard of that a forefather would call a descendant “Lord” (i.e., Master). Moreover, how could David, as the founding father of his dynasty, refer to a king to follow in his stead as his Lord? Some have proposed that David was referring to Solomon when he became king in David’s place while David was still alive. Yet this seems rather unlikely—for why then would the religious teachers of Christ’s day

have been confounded? Indeed, David shortly before his death still issued commands to Solomon. So Solomon was not David's Lord.

Following Jesus and the emergence of Christianity, a new Jewish explanation came about—that *le David* (“of David”) in the psalm's title meant not *by* David but *regarding* David and that the psalm was written by one of David's subjects. Yet this was obviously not the traditional understanding in Jesus' day, as His exchange with the Pharisees makes clear. They considered David the author, as Jesus affirmed. It is interesting that *le David* in the titles of the preceding psalms (108 and 109) was and still is understood in Jewish interpretation to mean that David wrote these.

The apparent dilemma of having David as the author is resolved if we understand that the messianic descendant of David is also Himself divine. Yet the wording of Psalm 110:1 does not seem to merely say that a future messianic King would one day be David's Lord. David, rather, appears to say that this One was *already* his personal Lord—that is, One he already served. This truly makes sense only if David recognized two divine beings existing at that time—one subordinate to the other. So here we have an Old Testament revelation of the existence of God and the Word—later known as God the Father and God the Son (Jesus Christ). While this was not generally understood by the Israelites, it should not surprise us to see that God's specially inspired prophets glimpsed this important truth.

The apostle Peter quoted Psalm 110:1 as applying to Jesus as the subordinate “Lord” at the right hand of God (Acts 2:34-36). The verse is also quoted in Hebrews 1:13, which shows that this position was given to Jesus and not to the angels.

Whereas Psalm 110:1 describes both Lords from a third-person perspective, verses 2-3 are written in second person—with David using the words “You” and “Your” in addressing the messianic King directly. Depending on the context, the name *YHWH* (represented here as “LORD”) could refer to God the Father or to the One who became the Messiah, Jesus Christ—or to both. In keeping with verse 1, the use of “LORD” in verse 2 still clearly refers to the Father. The “You” and “Your” with the “rod of...strength” or “mighty scepter” (NIV) in verses 2-3 must refer to the Messiah. Note God making “Your [the Messiah's] enemies” a footstool (subservient) in verse 1 and the mention again of “Your [the Messiah's] enemies” in verse 2.

David in verse 3 tells his messianic Lord that His people will be “volunteers” when the Lord comes in power. The wording here is “lit[erally] ‘freewill offerings,’ i.e., they will offer themselves as dedicated warriors to support [the Messiah] on the battlefield.... Accordingly, Paul speaks of Christ's followers offering their bodies ‘as living sacrifices’ (Ro 12:1) and of himself as a ‘drink offering’ (Php 2:17)” (*Zondervan NIV Study Bible*, note on Psalm 110:3). The latter part of verse 3 apparently depicts the Messiah “as clothed in royal majesty and glory and perpetually preserving the bloom of youth even as the ‘womb of the dawn’ gives birth each morning to the dew” (same note).

Verse 4 is either another third-person description of a divine conversation or a continuation of the second-person address to the Messiah. God is quoted as telling the divine Messiah, “You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.” Melchizedek (meaning “King of Righteousness”) was in Abraham's day the King of Salem (meaning King of “Peace”) and priest of God Most High (see Genesis 14:18-20). He was evidently a preincarnate manifestation of Jesus Christ (see “Who Was Melchizedek?” in our free booklet *Who Is God?*, pp. 32-33). Unlike the later Aaronic priesthood, His priesthood was not established on the basis of His descent within a priestly tribe. Rather, it was by direct divine appointment. Jesus would continue in this priestly role on the same basis. Discussion over this point, citing Psalm 110:4, can be found in Hebrews 5:5-11 and 6:20-7:28.

The declaration in Psalm 110 of the Messiah as a priest was a source of confusion for many of the Jews of Christ's day, leading some to mistakenly think that besides a Davidic Messiah of the line of Judah, there would also be a Messiah of the line of Aaron, who was from the tribe of Levi (and, outside the scope of this discussion, some also believed in a Messiah of the tribe of Joseph). Yet the *one* Messiah was to be both King and Priest. We will look further into the concept of the Melchizedek priesthood in our later reading of the book of Hebrews.

Note next the opening words of Psalm 110:5: “The Lord is at Your right hand.” The Lord (*Adonai*) at the beginning of the verse is evidently the Messianic King, Jesus Christ, who is at the right hand of the Father (see Acts 5:31; 7:55-56; Romans 8:34; Colossians 3:1). For recall from verse 1 the Father's appointment of the Lord (Jesus) to sit at His right hand. Therefore, verses 4-7 must constitute an address

to God the Father about the future rule of the messianic Lord—thus reciting back to God, in hope and trust, what God has revealed. Jesus will execute divine judgment throughout the world and achieve victory.

### “He Has Sent Redemption to His People” (Psalms 111–115)

January 7-17

Psalms 111–119, all untitled with no attributed authorship, form “a cluster of nine psalms framed by unusual alphabetic acrostics (...Ps 111 [112]; 119) that enclose the ‘Egyptian Hallel’ (...Ps 113–118) [so named because of the use of these *hallel* or ‘praise’ psalms at Passover in celebration of the Israelites’ deliverance in Egypt]. The framing psalms that enclose the celebration of redemption contained in the Hallel offer instruction in the piety that must characterize those who join in the celebration of God’s saving acts on behalf of his people” (*Zondervan NIV Study Bible*, note on Psalms 111–119).

Close comparison of **Psalms 111** and 112 “shows that these two psalms are twins, probably written by the same author and intended to be kept together.... Structurally, both Ps 111 and Ps 112 are alphabetic acrostics...but unique in that each (Hebrew) half-line advances the alphabet.... Both of these twin psalms are composed of the same number of Hebrew syllables” (note on Psalm 111). Both psalms begin with “Praise the LORD!” or *Hallelujah*. And Psalm 112 picks up thematically where Psalm 111 leaves off.

While Psalm 111 praises God for His great works—creative, providential and redemptive—the focus is on studying these works as part of wisdom instruction to see the benefits of following Him (see verse 2). God intended His works to be remembered and considered (verse 4). All that He does is characterized by enduring righteousness, grace, providence, truth and justice toward His people (see verses 3-7). Verses 7-8 declare God’s precepts, His laws, to be absolute and eternal. In verse 9, God’s redemption of His people harkens back to His deliverance of Israel from Egypt as well as to other acts of deliverance He performed for their benefit. The psalmist implicitly includes here future redemption through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, for he states in the same context that God’s covenant with His people is forever.

Where verse 5 says God provides for those who “fear Him”—who appropriately respect His great power and holy demands, understanding the consequences of disobedience—verse 10 adds the fact that this proper fear of God is “the beginning of wisdom” (see also Job 28:28; Proverbs 1:7; 9:10). We are further told that “a good understanding have all those *who do His commandments*” (Psalm 111:10). The italicized words here would literally be “*who do them*”—yet the plural pronoun in the Hebrew must refer back to “precepts” in verse 7—the “they” of verse 8. Nothing helps to understand the purpose for God’s laws more than actually *living* by them. The more we follow them and experience their benefits, the better we understand why God commanded them.

The conclusion of the psalm refers back to its opening call for *praise* of the Lord—affirming that His praise, like His enduring praiseworthy attributes (compare verses 3, 7, 9), will go on for eternity (verse 10).

**Psalm 112** is another wisdom psalm with, as noted above, the same acrostic structure as that of Psalm 111. The two psalms form a matched pair. Like Psalm 111, Psalm 112 also begins with “Praise the LORD” or *Hallelujah*—and follows from the final words of Psalm 111, “His praise endures forever.” Psalm 112 then picks up where 111 leaves off with the benefit of fearing God and keeping His commandments—finding happiness in them (compare 111:5, 10; 112:1).

Comparing the two psalms, we see in Psalm 112 that the righteous, who are like God in the way they live, will be greatly blessed with honor and glory and the perpetuity that God Himself has. Notice that both God and those who follow Him are “gracious and full of compassion” (111:4; 112:4). And of both we are told, “His righteousness endures forever” (111:3; 112:3, 9).

Observe that the wonderful blessings God’s people receive are not for selfishly hoarding—but for sharing with others in need. A godly person will have wisdom to manage his affairs and help others (verses 4-6), and he will not live in fear (verses 7-8). He will remain confident that God will turn things around so that “he will look in triumph on his foes” (verse 8, NIV).

Of course, we should not view Psalm 112 as a promise of material riches and an absence of hardship and harm throughout this life. God often does bless those who follow His ways with material well-being in the here and now, but we should understand the blessings mentioned throughout Psalm 112 as coming

over the course of life, through generations as God's way of life is passed down, and, most importantly, as part of the ultimate inheritance of the righteous in eternity to come.

This is in stark contrast, as the last verse shows, to the wicked, who will ultimately "melt away."

As earlier noted, **Psalm 113** is the first in a collection of six psalms (113–118) called the "Egyptian Hallel." These *hallel*, or "praise," psalms "came to be used in the Jewish liturgy at the great religious festivals (Passover, Weeks, Tabernacles, Dedication, New Moon; see Lev 23; Nu 10:10; Jn 10:22...)" (*Zondervan NIV Study Bible*, note on Psalms 113–118). The moniker "Egyptian" is derived from their special use in the celebration of Passover, commemorating the Israelites' deliverance in Egypt. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* states, "The Egyptian Hallel psalms received a special place in the Passover liturgy, as 113-114 were recited or sung before and 115-118 after the festive meal (cf. Matt 26:30; Mark 14:26)" (*Expositor's Bible Commentary*, introductory note on Psalm 113).

Regarding the customary singing of Psalms 113–114 prior to the traditional Passover meal of Jewish people today, *The Nelson Study Bible* states: "Both psalms remarkably capture in poetry and song the major ideas of the prose liturgy that is also recited before the Passover meal. That is, they speak of God's saving works at the time of the Exodus. The first psalm [113] focuses the worshipers on the condescending grace of God. He is the merciful Redeemer who bends from heaven to meet the needs of His people. Then with the singing of Ps. 114, the Jews recall Israel's deliverance from Egypt—the reason for the Passover celebration and the central act of God's saving grace" ("INDepth: The Psalms of the Passover," sidebar on Psalms 113–118).

Psalm 113 opens and closes with *Hallelujah*—"Praise the LORD." Indeed, in the opening three verses the psalmist five times calls for the servants of the Lord to praise His name. "In biblical thought a name is not a mere label of identification; it is an expression of the essential nature of its bearer. A man's name reveals his character.... This was a concept shared by the peoples of the ancient world. Hence to know that name of God is to know God as he has revealed himself (Ps. 9:10)" ("Name," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*). So God's name includes who He is, all He has done and everything He instructs and stands for.

In verse 3, the phrase "from the rising of the sun to its going down" designates not daytime, from dawn to dusk, but rather means from the distant east to the distant west—i.e., in all places God's name is to be praised.

Though God dwells in unimaginable glory and splendor beyond the creation, He nonetheless humbles Himself to be mindful of it (verses 4-6; compare 8:4). The Mighty God has compassion on His people. He lifts the poor and needy out of dust and ashes—referring to both the physically impoverished and spiritually humble and repentant—to seat them with princes (verses 7-8). He relieves the stigma and desperation of a barren woman by giving her a happy home (verse 9). In these verses we have a picture of God's salvation and reward of His humble people—raising them in stature to rulers and giving them joy in His family forever.

**Psalm 114**, still sung with Psalm 113 prior to the Jewish Passover meal as noted above, is a song about the power of God in delivering the Israelites from Egypt, bringing them into the Promised Land and preserving them in the wilderness in between.

Stating that the Israelites "went out...from a people of strange language" (verse 1) is meant to stress the foreignness of the Egyptians and their ways (compare Psalm 81:5)—particularly their foreignness from *God's* ways. This would also seem to indicate that the Israelites retained their own language while in Egypt. Recall that they were not scattered throughout Egypt but had been settled in the land of Goshen in the Nile Delta region. Sadly, the Israelites were nevertheless corrupted from living in Egypt. Thus, coming out of Egypt was representative of coming out of Egypt's ways. "In terms of 'biblical geography,' Egypt represents the world and the bondage of the sinner to its evil forces (Eph.2:1-3)" (Warren Wiersbe, *Be Exultant—Psalms 90–150: Praising God for His Mighty Works*, 2004, note on Psalm 114:1).

When God led Israel out of Egypt, the nation became His *sanctuary* and *dominion* (verse 2)—that is, His temple and sovereign domain or kingdom. God told Moses, "Let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them" (Exodus 25:8). And in dwelling among them, the people would in an extended sense become His holy dwelling place—His sanctuary. God further said: "I will dwell among the children of Israel and will be their God. And they shall know that I am the LORD their God, who brought them up

out of the land of Egypt, that I may dwell among them” (29:45-46). Today God dwells *within* His people, true Christians, who constitute spiritual Israel—the spiritual temple of God.

Verses 3-6 concern the miraculous parting of the waters of the Red Sea and the Jordan River for Israel to cross—at the beginning and end of their wilderness wanderings. The Red Sea is figuratively portrayed as “seeing” the dominion of God among His people and “fleeing” from His manifest power. The Jordan is personified as intentionally turning back from its normal flow. In concert with these events, we also see mountains and hills “skipping” like frightened lambs. This would seem to indicate major earthquake activity on one or both of these occasions.

Continuing the earthquake imagery, verse 7 directs the earth to tremble at God’s presence. This probably also is instruction to all the earth’s people to likewise tremble with appropriate fear and respect before God. Ironically, those with proper fear need not be terror-stricken—for God uses His great power to benefit His people. It was the awesome presence of God that gave the Israelites water in the desert to preserve them from the time they left Egypt to the time they entered the Promised Land (verse 8).

Even so, God’s presence within His people today will preserve them following their personal “Exodus” from the sin of Egypt and “Red Sea baptism,” giving them spiritual drink from the divine Rock (compare 1 Corinthians 10:1-6, 11). And by His mighty power He will see us through to the future “Jordan crossing” into the spiritual “Promised Land”—the Kingdom of God.

**Psalm 115** is another psalm of praise, portions of which appear in Psalm 135. As stated earlier, Psalm 115 was, and still is among the Jews, the first of those traditionally read or sung following the Passover meal. It is a song expressing communal confidence in God to help and bless His people, apparently originally intended to have groups singing responsively. “Structurally, the song advances in five movements involving a liturgical exchange between the people and temple personnel: (1) vv. 1-8: the people; (2) vv. 9-11: Levitical choir leader (the refrain [“He is their help and shield”] perhaps spoken by the Levitical choir); (3) vv. 12-13: the people; (4) vv. 14-15: the priests; (5) vv. 16-18: the people” (*Zondervan NIV Study Bible*, note on Psalm 115).

The psalmist has the people begin by directing praise away from themselves to where it rightly belongs—to God (verse 1a). As the song later shows, God’s people are not the source of their own blessings. Rather, God Himself is. God’s glory is revealed in His “mercy” (*hesed*, steadfast loyal love) and His “truth” (His revelation of what is true and His commitment to maintain His word)—His “love and faithfulness” toward His people (verse 1b, NIV)—as evidenced through their many blessings.

What, then, the people continue, is the basis for the gentile nations to question the whereabouts—the existence or power—of Israel’s God? (verse 2). God is not bound to the earth. He dwells in heaven, from where He rules over the universe with all power and authority to do throughout it as He pleases (see verse 3; compare verses 15-16). *Their* gods, in contrast, are merely lifeless metals formed into shape by the hands of men (verse 4). These idols are pointless “do-nothings.” They can’t speak, see, hear, smell, feel, walk or talk (verses 5-7)—all things the true God *can* do.

Then notice Psalm 115:8: “Those who make them [i.e., idols] are like them; so is everyone who trusts in them.” Yet idolaters themselves speak, see, hear, smell, feel, walk and talk. In what way, then, are they like their idols? Perhaps with the people the words are meant in a figurative sense of lacking spiritual discernment and ability—i.e., being spiritually deaf, dumb and blind. Note, for example, Jeremiah 5:21: “Hear this now, O foolish people, without understanding, who have eyes and see not, and who have ears and hear not.” Further, they lack spiritual power, being unable to “walk” in the way of God. The idolaters could also be said to be like the idols in the general sense of being foolish things. Both are also ultimately powerless and ineffectual. It could even be that the *end* of idolaters is in mind—that those who persist in idolatry will *become* like idols in that they will end up as lifeless human forms. They will have noses but will do no smelling, hands but will do no handling and mouths but will do no talking—because they will be dead (compare Psalm 115:17).

In contrast to vainly worshipping false idols is serving and trusting in the true God—who has all power and glory—for help, for protection and for perpetual blessing. The Levitical choir appeals to three groups of people to trust Him: the Israelite nation (verse 9), the house of Aaron, i.e. the priesthood (verse 10) and those who fear God (verse 11). The last group apparently means all God-fearers everywhere, in every nation, as the complementary statement in verse 13 adds “both small and great.” Verses 12-13 contain the response of the people, who refer to themselves as “us,” as in verse 1. “The threefold call to

trust the Lord, the three groups of people, and the threefold assurance of God's protection find their symmetric complement in vv. 12-15a with a threefold formula of blessing ('will bless us') and a restatement of the three groups ('house of Israel,' 'house of Aaron,' and 'those who fear the LORD')" (*Expositor's Bible Commentary*, note on verses 12-15). These groups are also found in Psalm 118:2-4 (compare 135:19-21, where the house of Levi is also mentioned).

Verses 14-15 of Psalm 115 follow with the priests' blessing on the people, ending with the declaration that God is the maker of heaven and earth. In the next and last section, the people give the final response in the song, acknowledging God's sovereignty over heaven and earth, including His appointment of man's subordinate dominion over the earth (verse 16, compare Genesis 1:28-30). This is part of God's great blessing. Furthermore, He desires that people acknowledge and enjoy His blessings—not that their lives and participation in His creation be snuffed out in death (verse 17). Those who sing this song in faith and hope conclude that they will bless God forevermore (verse 18)—implying a joyous eternal life of praising Him.

**“I Will Praise You, for You Have Answered Me,  
and Have Become My Salvation” (Psalms 116–118)**

**January 18-23**

**Psalm 116** is a song of thanksgiving to God for deliverance from “the pains of death...the pains of Sheol [the grave]” (verse 3). The circumstances of its original composition are unknown. In similar language to that of some of David's psalms, the author here speaks of personal rescue by God from some severe life-threatening situation. However, the “I” in the song eventually came to represent all of Israel, being sung on the occasion of Passover—the second of those psalms sung after the traditional Jewish meal, as explained in previous comments. In that sense, the song came to be seen as celebrating deliverance from Egyptian bondage (compare verse 16).

Interestingly, in Jewish interpretation every follower of God is to view himself as having been personally delivered from Egypt, making the “I” in the song all the more fitting for that occasion. We could say the same in a spiritual sense for those who make up God's Church—as Egypt represents the evil world we live in and its sin leading to death. In any case, the song certainly has application to all of God's saints (verse 15)—His holy ones—even today. And it particularly applies to the *quintessential* saint—the One who offered Himself up in sacrifice on Passover as the true Passover sacrifice—Jesus the Messiah. Jesus Himself was miraculously saved more than once from attempts against His life—until it was time for Him to make the supreme sacrifice and die. Yet even after He died, God the Father nevertheless rescued Him from death by resurrecting Him to eternal life. Just the same, God will often intervene throughout the physical lives of His people to keep them from untimely death. But should He choose to allow them to die before they have reached old age—or even if they do reach old age and die naturally—He will ultimately rescue them later through the future resurrection.

Looking at some of the specifics of the psalm, verse 6 says that God preserves the “simple.” Whereas this word often means naïve, here it could probably better be translated “innocent, clean, or untarnished” (*The Nelson Study Bible*, note on verse 6). Perhaps the person intended is uncomplicated in manner of thought because he is not trying to spin and maintain a web of deceit. The NIV translates the word in this instance as “simplehearted,” which could imply “those who are childlike in their sense of dependence on and trust in the Lord” (*Zondervan NIV Study Bible*, note on verse 6).

Having been rescued from death's clutches (verses 3-6, 8), the psalmist is able to find rest and peace of mind (verse 7). He knows that he “will walk before the LORD in the land of the living” (verse 9)—similar to words used elsewhere by David (Psalm 27:13; Psalm 56:13). Indeed, it appears that the psalmist believed in this outcome even during his ordeal, as his next words, “I believed, therefore I spoke” (verse 10a), are probably to be linked with the statement in verse 9 (contrary to the NKJV punctuation). “The belief in v. 10 is the hope, articulated in v. 9, that the psalmist would walk in the land of the living” (*Nelson*, note on verses 9-10). This interpretation we may surmise from the apostle Paul's quotation of the first part of verse 10 in 2 Corinthians 4 as a profession of faith, explaining why he risked his life preaching the gospel (see verses 7-14). Note Paul's words in verses 13-14: “And since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, ‘I believed and therefore I spoke,’ we also believe and therefore speak, knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you.” Paul in this statement may imply that the psalmist himself had faith not only in being presently rescued, but ultimately even in the future resurrection of the dead.

The latter part of Psalm 116:10 should probably not be within the quotation of what the psalmist had earlier spoken. Rather, it is likely just a statement of fact, as Green's Literal Translation presents it: "I was greatly afflicted." In verse 11, the word rendered "haste" could be interpreted "dismay" (NIV) or "alarm" (Green's). And the despairing statement that "all men are liars" could mean that all are "vain" or "unreliable" (see *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, note on verses 10-11)—in contrast to God, who is always true and trustworthy, the only one who can be absolutely counted on to come through on His promises.

In verse 12, the psalmist considers what he will give to God for the good that God has done for Him. Of course, none of us could ever repay God for the blessings He has given us. That is not the point. Rather, our obligation to our Maker and Savior is to do all that He requires of us—to give to Him what He expects of us—to submit our lives wholly to His will. This is the context to bear in mind for the rest of the psalm.

The first thing the psalmist answers with is that He will "take up the cup of salvation" (verse 13a). Some see here a drink offering (compare Numbers 28:7). However, it appears that the psalmist is taking up this particular cup to drink from it himself rather than pouring it out as a drink offering. The figure of the "cup" occurs elsewhere in the Psalms as signifying one's lot in life—what has been apportioned to him (see 16:5). In 23:5, as part of dining at the Lord's banquet, the cup is shown to be running over with blessings. Here in Psalm 116 it offers salvation. The meaning, then, would seem to be that the psalmist will embrace this salvation that God has apportioned to him. As his duty to God, he will *accept* God's offer of eternal life and blessing along with all the terms that accompany it.

There may be more to the imagery here as well. Some view the "sacrifice of thanksgiving" in verse 17 to mean a thank offering—a special peace offering—and see the cup as "the cup of wine drunk at the festal meal that climaxed a thank offering (cf. 22:26, 29; Lev 7:11-21)—called [it is presumed in this case] the 'cup of salvation' because the thank offering and its meal celebrated deliverance by the Lord" (*Zondervan*, note on Psalm 116:13).

Furthermore, recall that this psalm became associated with the Passover—and consider that this verse may have given the psalm its special place in the Jewish liturgy of the evening. As *The Nelson Study Bible* comments: "At Passover this psalm is read after the meal, immediately following the third cup of wine, called *the cup of salvation*. How appropriate that this Passover psalm would call to mind God's cup of salvation the very night that the Savior was betrayed (Matt. 26:27; Luke 22:14-22)" (note on Psalm 116:12-13). We do not eat a meal as part of the Passover service today, recognizing that Jesus implemented new symbolism. But the truths expressed in these psalms readily correspond to the spiritual meaning of this sacred memorial of Christ's death. The psalmist's sufferings certainly prefigured those of Jesus. And there may well be a relation between the cup of salvation here and the cup of the New Covenant that Jesus instituted at the Passover. Indeed, all of God's people must accept the redemption and salvation that comes through it.

Harkening back to his question of verse 12, concerning what he will render to God, the psalmist next answers that he will call on the name of the Lord (verse 13b). That is, he will look to God as his source of help—as his God. Next he says he will pay his vows to God (verse 14)—honor the promises and commitments he has made—in the presence of all God's people, as a witness and example.

The psalm then makes what may seem a strange, non-sequitur statement in verse 15: "Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His saints." Some think the word for "precious" here should be translated "costly"—meaning that God takes it as a heavy loss—so that He does not readily allow it. Yet God does not lose His faithful saints. Those who die are preserved for His Kingdom, and for Him the time passes quickly. So how are we to understand the verse? The *Zondervan Student Bible* comments: "This verse, often read at funerals, in no way implies that God enjoys the death of his people. Instead, it means that he carefully watches over their death, and that it matters deeply to him" (note on verse 15). While true, this does not explain how the verse fits here. Indeed, if the psalmist were glad of God rescuing him from death, why is he saying this at all?

Recall the context of verse 12: "What shall I render to the LORD for all His benefits toward me?" Immediately after saying he will render the paying of his vows in verse 14, we find this statement in verse 15 that God considers the death of His saints to be precious or valuable. In context, it too is something rendered to God. The point would seem to be that the giving of ourselves wholly to God—unto death if

necessary—is highly valued in His sight. After all, in such death God does not lose His servant. Just the opposite, it is a moment of immense gain. For when saints die their salvation is assured—surely a very precious thing in God’s sight, as in their next conscious moment they will be immortal spirit members of His family, faithful through all eternity to come. Even though God has rescued him, the psalmist knows that God could still require the sacrifice of his life—which he is willing to give, knowing that God will resurrect him in the future. Here, of course, is a very strong parallel with Jesus Christ, who willingly submitted to the sacrificial death God required of Him in anticipation of life with the Father yet to come.

Following on in the listing of what he will give to God, the psalmist next commits himself to being God’s humble servant. Interestingly he points out in this context that God has loosed his bonds. God has released him from death’s grip not to wild abandon, but to freely and fully serving the true God. Israel shared this responsibility in the Exodus and throughout its national history. And Christians have likewise been freed from their sinful past to obey God from now on (compare Romans 6:15-22).

The psalmist next declares that he will offer the “sacrifice of thanksgiving” (Psalm 116:17). As mentioned above, this could refer to the giving of a special thank offering (Leviticus 7:12). Yet it could more generally apply to simply thanking and praising God, at least in a figurative sense. We should be extremely grateful for all that God has done for us and express our gratitude to Him regularly and often when we call on Him in prayer.

Throughout this section, we see a loving relationship in action. God loves the writer, providing him with many blessings, including instruction on his obligations to his Creator. The author loves God, responding with a willing heart eager to fulfill his responsibilities in living according to God’s Word. In the briefest of terms, God commands and man obeys. But there is more—a loving relationship exists, as illustrated throughout the psalms. The New Testament further develops this relational aspect of mutual love between the Father and the believing son or daughter.

Verse 18 may be only a reiteration of verse 14. Yet it could well be more than that, signifying that the psalm itself, in its composition and later actual performance in the temple (compare verse 19), is a fulfillment of paying vows made to God. On a prophetic level, the wording may also foreshadow Jesus’ offering of Himself in Jerusalem as the true Passover sacrifice—and the witness and example given to His followers.

**Psalm 117** is the shortest psalm and the shortest chapter in the Bible. It has a simple yet important directive: *everyone* is to praise the Lord (verse 1). The psalmists typically call for the faithful of Israel to offer praise. But in this psalm, the writer calls for “all you Gentiles”—that is, “all you nations” (NIV)—and “all you peoples” to praise God.

In Romans 15:11 the apostle Paul quoted Ps.117:1 in conjunction with other Old Testament passages to explain that God intended the gentiles to have a relationship with Him as well (see Romans 15:8-12; compare Psalm 18:49; Deuteronomy 32:43; Isaiah 11:10).

Along with the other songs of this section, the psalmist here uses *Hallelujah*—“Praise the LORD” (Psalm 117:1-2). He also uses the word *shavah* for “laud” or “extol” (verse 1, NIV). “*Laud*, which means ‘to speak well of,’ nicely parallels the term *praise*, which means ‘to be excitedly boastful about’” (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verse 1).

God is to be praised for His *hesed* (His loyal, steadfast lovingkindness and mercy) and His enduring *emet* or truth, implying “faithfulness” (NIV) to maintain His word, to keep His promises (verse 2). Through these, those of all mankind who respond in sincerity and faith may share in the wonderful, eternal blessings of the people of God—for they, too, will be His people.

**Psalm 118** is a psalm of thanksgiving and prayer for deliverance from enemies. Though the particular circumstances of its composition are unidentified, we do see that it concerns confidence in victory after apparent near loss in a battle against a group of enemy nations (see verses 10-13). The last of the Egyptian Hallel (“praise”) collection (113–118), Psalm 118 was traditionally sung or recited at the end of the Passover evening liturgy—though Psalm 136 was later added to the end, as it expands on the opening and closing words of Psalm 118, “Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy [*hesed*, loyal lovingkindness] endures forever.” These words, taken from the psalm David composed for the occasion of bringing the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem (see 1 Chronicles 16:34), were also used to open Psalms 106 and 107. We should recall that the Egyptian Hallel psalms were also sung at all the

annual festivals. Indeed, Psalm 118 was an important part of the temple liturgy at the Feast of Tabernacles, as we will see.

Building from the call to thanks and praise in the first verse, verses 2-4 direct the call to three groups—the nation of Israel, the Aaronic priesthood and, in general, all those who fear God—the same groupings found in Psalm 115:9-13 (compare 135:19-20, which also mentions the house of Levi). The call here is to proclaim the repeated refrain “His mercy endures forever.”

Many maintain that the “I” speaking throughout the remainder of Psalm 118 is the Davidic king leading the battle against the enemy, given his declaration about destroying the enemies (compare verses 10-12). Others contend that the psalmist wrote this song to be sung by all Israelites from a first person perspective—in both a collective and personal sense. Of course, a righteous king could have written it with that broader intention as well. In the time of Jesus Christ, the “I” who acts “in the name of the LORD” (verses 10-12, 26) was understood to refer to the king of Israel—indeed, the Messiah (see John 12:13). The psalm is certainly messianic, as we will later see from explicit New Testament references.

Verses 5-7 of Psalm 118 recall God’s past deliverance and express confidence in His ongoing faithfulness. As the all-powerful God is on the side of His people, there is no reason to fear anything from anyone (verse 6; compare Romans 8:31).

Psalm 118:8-9 acknowledges the crucial understanding that ultimate trust must be in God alone—not in oneself or other people, no matter what their position or power may be. Interestingly, it has been pointed out that these two verses form the central verses in the Bible as we have it—that is, according to the book arrangement and chapter and verse divisions found in most modern Bibles (James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms: An Expositional Commentary*, Vol. 3: Psalms 107–150, 2005). Of course, the modern arrangement is actually not the original one—and chapter and verse divisions came centuries after the canonization of Scripture and are sometimes poorly determined. Nevertheless, the message of the particular verses here is indeed a central theme of Scripture. Man, at his best, is limited, mortal, unreliable. As God says in Jeremiah 17:5-7: “Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength.... [But] blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD.”

We then come in Psalm 118:10-18 to the actual circumstances of the battle. The King James and New King James translators, and the translators of many other modern versions, consider that the battle here is to be understood in the past tense, as having already been won—thus explaining the psalm’s focus on thanksgiving and God having answered prayer (verse 21). Yet notice in the KJV and NKJV the problem in saying that the enemies “surrounded me” and “were quenched” (past tense) and that “I *will* destroy them” (future tense). Notice furthermore the confidence in a future outcome—“I shall not die, but live” (verse 17)—and, more striking, the prayer for God’s intervention: “Save now, I pray, O LORD” (verse 25). Thus the battle is ongoing—the thanks and praise being for past deliverance and blessings and for intervention that will surely yet come.

This being so, the word translated “surrounded” in verses 10-12 is probably better translated as “*have* surrounded” or, as in Green’s Literal Translation, “surround.” The psalm expresses the dire gravity of the situation by using this term four times. The psalmist compares the enemies to a swarm of bees (verse 12). Yet they “are quenched” (GLT)—that is, they are *to be* quenched—as quickly as burning thorns. For Israel, with God’s help, will prevail (same verse).

Going back to the Greek Septuagint translators, many have seen a need to emend the text of verse 13 to say that “I was pushed” (NIV) rather than follow the Masoretic Text: “Pushing, *you pushed me* to fall” (GLT). In the Masoretic Text, the words seem addressed to God, yet the *next* words are “But the LORD [has] helped me” (same verse). This, however, is not as contradictory as might at first seem. For it would actually fit what is clearly stated a few verses later: “The LORD has chastened me severely, but He has not given me over to death” (verse 18). Evidently the enemy invasion and initial losses constitute punishment from God for some unnamed sin. But the psalmist is nonetheless confident that God will turn things around, so there must already have been repentance, particularly as he sees himself—or God’s people collectively—as righteous (compare verses 15, 19-20). The passage could also be applied to the Messiah, who, though innocent Himself, would initially suffer adversity and death for the sins of all nations but would later return victorious over all enemies.

Verse 14 is taken from the Song of Moses in Exodus 15:2, invoking the imagery of God’s deliverance of Israel from Egypt—perhaps helping to give the psalm its place within the Egyptian Hallel

collection. Repetition concerning God's right hand (verses 15-16) may also be taken from the Song of Moses (see Exodus 15:6-7). Just as God powerfully intervened for Israel in the Exodus, so would He intervene on this later occasion—and so will He intervene for His people today. The same words from Exodus 15:2 are also quoted in Isaiah 12:2, meaning that they are found in the Law, the Prophets and the Writings—the three major sections that make up the Old Testament.

Isaiah 12, it should be mentioned, is a prophecy of Israel's future repentance when God delivers His people from national enemies—and Psalm 118, beyond its application to the circumstances in which it was written, should likewise be seen as prophetic of the future. Indeed, we elsewhere see God's people at that time singing the Song of Moses (compare Revelation 15:2-3). Isaiah 12:3 speaks of drawing water with joy from the wells of salvation—which became related to the Feast of Tabernacles, during which a special water-drawing and water-pouring ceremony was instituted. In Psalm 118:15, the mention of rejoicing and salvation in the tents of the righteous also helped to connect this psalm with the Feast of Tabernacles in the worship services of the temple.

Verses 19-20, calling for the opening of the “gates of righteousness” so as to pass through—also called here “the gate of the LORD, through which the righteous shall enter”—is often seen as picturing a festival procession coming through the gates of Jerusalem or the gates of the temple. The imagery seems related to what David wrote in Psalm 24, which many see as descriptive of the Ark of the Covenant being brought into the city or tabernacle gates after military victory. “There is only One who can enter the gates of the Lord of His own accord—the perfect King of glory” (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on 118:19-21). And this would seem to point to Jesus Christ as ultimately fulfilling these verses.

The idea of a procession is also found in an alternative translation of Psalm 118:27, as we will later see—all of this adding to the connection of Psalm 118 to the annual festivals.

Yet others suggest a more figurative meaning for the gates of righteousness—that the only way into the presence of the Lord, to salvation (verse 21), is through righteousness. Thus, verses 19-20 may be part of an expression of repentance—of determination to do what God says as He empowers. Probably both ideas are intended, as in Isaiah 26:2: “Open the gates, that the righteous nation which keeps the truth may enter in.” While Jesus alone lived a perfectly righteous life, others can receive righteousness through Him. Jesus mentioned the narrow gate that leads to life (Matthew 7:13-14) and said that He Himself is the gate or door leading to salvation (John 10:9).

The next verse (Psalm 118:21) declares intention to praise God for having answered His people's prayer and having become their salvation. The latter phrase about God having become salvation is a refrain, repeated—in a slightly reworded form—from the verse taken from the Song of Moses (verse 14). It is worth noting that the word in both places translated salvation, occurring 78 times in the Old Testament, is *yeshu'ah*, which is very close to the name *Yeshua*—that is, Jesus. (The name *Yeshua* is probably a contraction of the longer form *Yehoshua*, meaning “Yahweh Is Salvation.”)

Again, there is a powerful messianic aspect to this psalm. The ultimate deliverance sought would come through the Messiah. Note particularly verses 22-23 about the rejected stone becoming the “chief cornerstone.” The NIV has “capstone.” The literal meaning, as the *Zondervan NIV Study Bible* points out in its note on verse 22, is “‘head of the corner’—either a capstone over a door (a large stone used as a lintel), or a large stone used to anchor and align the corner of a wall, or the keystone of an arch (see Zec 4:7; 10:4). By a wordplay (pun) the author hints at ‘chief ruler’ (the Hebrew word for ‘corner’ is sometimes used as a metaphor for leader/ruler; see Isa 19:13; see also Jdg 20:2; 1 Sa 14:38). This stone, disdained by the worldly powers, has become the most important stone in the structure of the new world order that God is bringing about through Israel. Jesus applied this verse (and v. 23) to himself (see Mt 21:42; Mk 12:10-11; Lk 20:17; see also Ac 4:11; Eph 2:20; 1 Pe 2:7).”

It is not clear what the psalmist himself had in mind when he wrote these words. Some suggest that Israel or its king was meant as the rejected stone—now saved and placed at the head of all others. Yet perhaps the psalmist directly foresaw the Messiah as bringing the salvation foretold in the psalm. In any case, the inspired words primarily refer to Jesus Christ, as the New Testament makes clear.

In verse 24, the day the psalm designates for rejoicing seems to refer to the time of victory—the day of salvation—though this of course also prefigures the ultimate time of God's future intervention in the Day of the Lord. This would also fit the time of the Messiah's crowning as King over all. However, the day of rejoicing and gladness became specifically associated with God's festivals, further encouraging the

use of this psalm as a festival song. Of course, verse 24 could on some level be a more general call to rejoicing in all that God does for His people—that is, every day is a day God has made, a fact to always find happiness in. But in context, the emphasis here is on the day of salvation—present and future.

With this focus, verse 25 appeals to God to “save *now*”—that is, to let today be the day of salvation by granting help and victory. The Hebrew phrase here, *hoshi'ah na'*, “is related to the noun *yeshu'ah* (‘salvation,’ ‘victory,’ vv. 14-15, 21)” (*Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, note on verses 24-25). This phrase *hoshi'ah na'*, later contracted to *hoshana* and transliterated into Greek in the New Testament as *hosanna*, became an appeal for the messianic age foreshadowed in the Feast of Tabernacles. Indeed, Psalm 118 became, as mentioned earlier, an important part of that feast’s temple liturgy. The binding of the sacrifice to the altar in verse 27 is thought by many to represent a thank offering, but some came to relate it to the sacrifices made during the annual festivals, particularly the Feast of Tabernacles. The Tabernacles link was made stronger by an alternate translation of this verse, as given in the NIV: “With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession up to the horns of the altar.” In Jesus’ day, the Jewish people during the Feast of Tabernacles would sing Psalm 118, proclaiming Hoshana, while waving palm and other branches during the priestly procession along a path decorated with branches that culminated at the temple altar with the water-pouring ritual.

This provides a historical context for the crowd’s reception of Jesus when He made His triumphal ride into Jerusalem on a donkey in fulfillment of another messianic prophecy. While this took place just prior to the Passover, the people responded with Tabernacles ritual—as they believed Jesus had come to inaugurate the messianic age. Notice what happened: “And a very great multitude spread their clothes on the road; others cut down branches from the trees and spread them on the road. Then the multitudes who went before and those who followed cried out, saying: ‘Hosanna to the Son of David! “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!” Hosanna in the highest!’” (Matthew 21:8-9). John 12:13 says they “took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him, and cried out: ‘Hosanna! “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!” The King of Israel!’” Mark 11:10 adds that they cried out “Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that comes in the name of the Lord!”

Of course, they did not understand that Jesus had to first fulfill the Passover symbolism at that time by laying down His life as a sacrifice. Consider in this light that Psalm 118 was also part of the Passover liturgy in that day, highlighting a crossover in themes between the spring and fall festivals. It is interesting to note that Jesus at His final Passover spoke to His disciples not only of His imminent sacrifice, but also of salvation in His future Kingdom—which is predominantly a fall-festival theme. It is also the foremost theme in this psalm. As Psalm 118 closed the traditional Jewish Passover service, many have suggested that it was the hymn that Jesus and His disciples sang before leaving the upper room (see Matthew 26:30), though we cannot be sure.

Psalm 118 closes with a personal declaration of worshipping God with praise (verse 28) and the same opening call to thank God for His goodness and enduring lovingkindness (verse 29)—the basis for His salvation.

### **“Make Me Walk in the Path of Your Commandments” (Psalm 119:1-40)      January 24-25**

**Psalm 119**, a massive alphabetic acrostic poem, is the last of the apparent collection of psalms starting with two other acrostic psalms, 111 and 112—thus framing the Egyptian Hallel (113–118). Yet in a number of ways Psalm 119 is in a class unto itself. It is by far the longest of the psalms as well as the longest chapter in the Bible. More than a wisdom psalm providing instruction in how to live, it is an extensive love song to God about His law as well as a plea for deliverance from oppressors. The author, who is now unknown, repeatedly declares his passionate devotion to God’s law as a wise and reliable guide for life—and speaks of finding delight and spiritual strength in it in the midst of distress. In general, the “law” or *torah* the psalmist extols refers to more than the first five books of the Bible classified as the Torah or Law. Rather, this word more broadly means “teaching” and includes all of God’s revealed instruction in Old Testament Scripture—and we today can even more broadly apply the term to the whole of the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, the entire written Word of God.

It should be obvious that the creation of this lengthy acrostic psalm was a major intellectual undertaking. While God specially inspired the authors of the psalms, as He did all the biblical writers, it is clear from the various styles within the psalms that He made use of their individual talents. And the author of Psalm 119 was no doubt a brilliant thinker. For each of the 22 consonants in the Hebrew

language, the psalmist has composed an eight-verse paragraph (called a strophe or stanza in poetic structure). Each of the eight verses in a stanza begins with the same letter. Verses 1-8 begin with *aleph*, the first letter in the Hebrew alphabet. Verses 9-16 begin with *beth*, the second letter in the alphabet, and so on through the remainder of the alphabet. Given this construction, it is likely the poet intended his work to be memorized. Can you imagine memorizing all 176 verses of this psalm? The acrostic device appears in other psalms (25; 34; 37; 111; 112; 145), where it also serves as a memory aid.

Psalm 119 uses eight different words to designate God's revealed instruction to humankind:

<i>torah</i>	"law" (also more broadly meaning instruction)
<i>'edot</i>	"testimonies" (reiterations of God's standards)—rendered "statutes" in the NIV
<i>piqqudim</i>	"precepts" (injunctions or imposed rules)
<i>huqqim</i>	"statutes" (inscribed, enacted laws)—"decrees" (NIV)
<i>mitzvot</i>	"commandments" or "commands" (constitutional orders)
<i>mishpatim</i>	"judgments" (judicial rulings for living)—"laws" and "ordinances" in the NIV
<i>dabar</i>	"word" (sometimes here in the sense of law, sometimes of promise)
<i>'imrah</i>	"word" (saying, sometimes here in the sense of law, but more often of promise)

These various terms the psalmist "distributes throughout the 22 stanzas (using all eight in *He, Waw, Heth, Yodh, Kaph, Pe*—never using less than six), employing a different order in each stanza" (*Zondervan NIV Study Bible*, note on Psalm 119). As another commentary points out regarding this psalm: "Students disagree on this, but it appears that every verse contains a direct mention of God's Word except seven: verses 3, 37, 84, 90, 121, 122, and 132. If you count 'ways' [from Hebrew *derek*] as a synonym for God's Word, then you can eliminate verses 3 and 37.... The writer may have been meditating on Psalm 19 where David listed six names for the Scriptures, five of which are found in 119—law, testimony, precept, commandment, and judgment. Some of the vocabulary of 19 is also found in 119, including perfect or blameless...pure...righteous and righteousness...and meditate or meditation.... Both compare the Word of God to gold ([19:]10/119:72; 127) and honey ([19:]10/119:103), and in both there is an emphasis on keeping or obeying God's Word" (Warren Wiersbe, *Be Exultant: Psalms 90–150*, introductory notes on Psalm 119).

This huge composition no doubt took a great deal of time, effort and care to create. The *Zondervan NIV Study Bible* puts it well: "The alphabetic acrostic form, especially one as elaborate as this, may appear arbitrary and artificial to a modern reader (as if the author merely selected a traditional form from the poet's workshop and then labored to fill it with pious sentences), but a sympathetic and reflective reading of this devotional will compel a more favorable judgment. The author had a theme that filled his soul, a theme as big as life, that ranged the length and breadth and height and depth of a person's walk with God. Nothing less than the use of the full power of language would suffice, and of that the alphabet was a most apt symbol" (note on Psalm 119).

Commentator Wiersbe remarks on this unknown psalmist: "Whoever the author was, he is a good example for us to follow, for he had an intense hunger for holiness and a passionate desire to understand God's Word in a deeper way. In all but fourteen verses, he addresses his words to the Lord personally, so this psalm is basically a combination of worship, prayer, praise, and admonition. The writer must have been a high profile person because he mentioned the opposition of rulers (vv. 23, 161; 'princes' in KJV and NASB), a word that can refer to Gentile rulers or local Jewish tribal leaders (Neh. 3), and he also spoke to kings (v. 46). In the psalm, there are no references to a sanctuary, to sacrifices, or to a priestly ministry [perhaps indicating a time of apostasy or the period between the temple's destruction and reconstruction]. The cast of characters includes the Lord God, a remnant of godly people in the nation (vv. 63, 74, 79, 120, etc.), the psalmist, and the ungodly people who despised him (v. 141), persecuted him (vv. 84-85, 98, 107, 109, 115, 121-122, etc.), and wanted to destroy him (v. 95). The psalmist referred to them as 'the proud' or 'the arrogant' (vv. 21, 51, 69, 78, 85, 122). They were people who were born into the covenant but did not value the spiritual riches of that relationship. They disdained the law and openly disobeyed it. The writer was reproached by them (vv. 22-23, 39, 42) and suffered greatly from their false accusations (vv. 50-51, 61, 67, 69-71, 75, 78)" (introductory notes on Psalm 119). The same commentator goes on to explain his reasons for thinking the author may have been the prophet Jeremiah

on the basis of the above criteria. Others have made the same identification, though David is more typically seen as the author.

Whoever wrote it, Psalm 119 remains a powerful witness to us today. As Wiersbe comments: “The basic theme of Psalm 119 is the practical use of the Word of God in the life of the believer. When you consider that the writer probably did not have a complete Old Testament, let alone a complete Bible [and probably not a personal copy of every scriptural scroll], this emphasis is both remarkable and important. Christian believers today [personally] own complete Bibles, yet how many of them say that they love God’s Word and get up at night or early in the morning to read it and meditate on it (vv. 55, 62, 147-148)? How many Christian believers ignore the Old Testament Scriptures or read the Old Testament in a careless and cursory manner? Yet here was a man who rejoiced in the Old Testament Scripture—which was the only Word of God he had—and considered God’s Word his food (v. 103) and his greatest wealth! (vv. 14, 72, 127, 162). His love for the Word of God puts today’s believers to shame. If the psalmist with his limited knowledge and resources could live a godly and victorious life feeding on the Old Testament, how much more ought Christians today live for the Lord. After all, we have the entire Bible before us and two millennia of church history behind us!” (same notes).

So true. And those professing Christians who argue that God’s laws are obsolete, arbitrary and unnecessary would have a hard time convincing the writer of this psalm of their position—much less the great God who ultimately inspired this psalm to be written!

As to the psalm’s setting of persecution by enemy oppressors, we should all be able to identify with this element. For even if we have no obvious adversaries on a human level, all of God’s people are at constant war with the unseen demonic spirit rulers of this world (see Ephesians 6:12).

Concerning the arrangement of Psalm 119, “apart from the obvious formal structure dictated by the chosen acrostic form, little need (or can) be said. It must be noted, however, that the first three and the last three verses were designed as introduction and conclusion to the whole. The former sets the tone of instruction in godly wisdom; the latter succinctly restates and summarizes the main themes. It may also be observed that the middle of the psalm has been marked by a similar three-verse introduction to the second half.... For the rest, the thought meanders, turns back upon itself and repeats (with various nuances)” (*Zondervan*, note on Psalm 119).

As mentioned, the *Aleph* strophe or stanza (verses 1-8) begins with an introduction to the rest of the psalm that explains that the way for a person to be blessed, to experience true happiness in life, is to be “undefiled” or “blameless” (NIV) in the way he lives. To be *blameless* does not mean that one never sins. Rather, it means that one is beyond reproach. Nothing can be held against him. This comes from always repenting when one sins, never failing to return to God and His ways.

As is clear from the rest of the stanza (verses 4-8), the poet himself is by no means perfect. After stating his knowledge of God’s requirements of us (verse 4), he expresses the wish that his own ways were naturally directed to meet them (verse 5), implying that they were not. If his natural inclination were to obey God, then he wouldn’t be ashamed when he looked into God’s Word (verse 6). Because the human heart is hostile toward God (Romans 8:7) and deceptively wicked (Jeremiah 17:9), the psalmist finds that God’s law, like a mirror, reflects his inadequacies (James 1:24; Romans 3:20).

As he learns to better follow God’s righteous way, he will be able to praise God from an upright heart (verse 7). The author understands that in keeping God’s law, his heart will move away from its selfish orientation toward the righteousness of God: “But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does” (James 1:25, NIV).

The stanza closes with the psalmist’s intention to strive to obey God, praying for God’s forgiveness—that he will not be forsaken (Psalm 119:8), possibly hinting at his present suffering, as mentioned later. Indeed, repentance always includes a resolve to follow God’s laws.

In the *Beth* strophe (verses 9-16), the writer asks, “How can a young man keep his way pure?” (verse 8, NIV). Or in a general sense: how can we honor the promise we made to keep God’s law?

Some have thought “young man” to be a characterization of the author. This is possible, but others maintain that “more likely it indicates instruction addressed to the young after the manner of the wisdom teachers (see 34:11; Pr 1:4; Ecc 11:9; 12:1...)” (*Zondervan NIV Study Bible*, note on Psalm 119:9). While

specific younger disciples could have been the intended audience, it may simply be that the psalm was designed for memorization by all the young people of the nation as part of their education.

Of course, the psalmist was also preaching to himself. In his prayer to God, He was committing himself to God's way. In this stanza he declares a number of things he will do to keep his life clean, giving us principles to apply in our own lives.

The author states that a person determined to live a pure, obedient life will *take heed* (verse 9) and be mindful and aware of the context of life. God is the Author of life, and His Word is an instruction book for how life works (as well as how it doesn't). A wise individual will be conscious of and utilizing such a priceless resource so readily available.

Such a person will also *seek God* with enthusiasm—wholeheartedly (verse 10)—spending time in study, prayer, meditation. He will delight in God's Word and let it capture his thoughts (verses 11, 15-16). Verse 11 shows that God's Word must be more to us than something that we read. It must be written on our hearts and minds (see Jeremiah 31:33)—hidden, protected, within us as valuable treasure (see Psalm 119:14).

Furthermore a committed person will willingly *learn* from God by approaching his studies with a teachable attitude. And he will *discuss* with others what he has learned from the law (verse 13).

Yet the psalmist does not fail to acknowledge that his success ultimately depends not on his own efforts, but on what God will do. In addition to the things an individual must do in living a righteous life, the writer states here two things that *God* must do.

First, God must motivate and empower him to keep him on track. "Do not let me stray from your commands" (verse 10, NIV). God will not take away an individual's free will and responsibility to choose to obey, but He will undertake loving surveillance and shepherding, helping his servant to perceive and aspire to the right way and follow it: "You comprehend my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways.... You have hedged me behind and before, and laid Your hand upon me.... Where shall I go from your Spirit.... Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me" (Psalm 139:2-10).

Second, God must teach him (verse 12). The author affirms the importance of God opening his understanding. He wanted to learn by studying God's Word and putting it into practice. This does not preclude learning from other teachers, but God would be his primary Instructor. Because God thoroughly knows each individual, He tailors the timing, the presentation, the "aha" experiences for all of His children—the pattern He established for parents in every age (see Deuteronomy 6:6-7). And realize again that rather than giving us minute direction in every action of our life, God gives us widely applicable *principles* through which we learn the how and why of living His way. By analogy, a wise teacher leads his students to understanding the lesson, not to merely reciting what they hear. Such understanding helps us to think and reason more clearly about our choices.

We must always remember that we cannot succeed in living God's way on our own. We desperately need His intervening spiritual power and continuing instruction.

In the *Gimel* strophe (verses 17-24) the psalmist continues the thought of God teaching him and first explicitly mentions his present trial. He needs God to open his mind to revelation from God's Word (verse 18). He needs God's help to live and to live by that Word (verse 17). Commentator George Knight remarks on verse 17 that the key word in Psalm 119 "is the word *live*.... For the *Torah*, God is the Living God. This Living God offers his children *his* life, and that is not mere biological life. It is life in the Spirit, to which physical death has nothing to say. The five books of the Pentateuch culminate at Deut. 30:15, 19 with God's 'Word': 'See I have set before you this day life and good, death and evil.' The passage then goes on to declare that 'life' is bound up with love and with obedience to God's revealed *commandments, statutes, and ordinances*" (The Daily Study Bible Series: *Psalms*, Vol. 2, note on Psalm 119:17-24).

The poet declares that he is a "stranger on earth" (verse 19, NIV; compare verse 54). The Israelites were considered to be strangers and sojourners—following laws and customs not of this world and looking forward to God's messianic Kingdom (see Leviticus 25:23; 1 Chronicles 19:15). Sadly the Israelites often conformed to the idolatrous world around them, leaving only a faithful remnant who continued as God's special people—foreign to this world and its ways. In the New Testament, Christians are referred to as strangers and pilgrims who look for a better country—that of God's coming Kingdom (see Hebrews 11:13; 1 Peter 2:11). The writer faced the dilemma of dual citizenship—living under wayward human dominion while yearning for God's righteous administration (verse 20). Jesus foresaw

the difficulties His disciples would confront as they lived *in* the world while not *of* it. He prayed that God would protect them from evil and set them apart by His word of truth (John 17:14-17). Similarly, the psalmist asks God to make His commandments (His truth) clearly evident (Psalm 119:19).

In the final verses of this stanza, the psalmist desires relief from those who are arrogant, scornful and contemptuous (verses 21-22). They stray from God's commands and earn for themselves an inevitable outcome. As already mentioned, the author was evidently an individual of some importance, possibly in the government—perhaps an advisor or prophet—because he was slandered by rulers (verse 23). If the writer was a prophet and brought a corrective message from God, it follows that evil rulers might conspire to kill him (compare verses 85, 95, 110). Whether or not the prophet Jeremiah was the author of the psalm, he provides a perfect example of this, for his life was repeatedly threatened because he faithfully brought warning messages to the kingdom of Judah and its leadership. As he said, “They have dug a pit to take me, and hidden snares for my feet. Yet, LORD, You know all their counsel which is against me, to slay me” (Jeremiah 18:22-23).

The psalmist turns his present crisis over to God and takes comfort in serving Him. Rather than taking vengeance or being unduly distressed by slanderers, he takes comfort in God's laws as his “counselors” (Psalm 119:24). This may be a hint that the religious hierarchy in the land was corrupt and unreliable—so that the author in this environment had to look to God's words alone as his teachers and spiritual advisers. Of course, even when there are faithful teachers to learn from, their teachings must be confirmed through the direct counsel of Scripture (see Acts 17:11; 20:27).

In the *Daleth* stanza (verses 25-32) the poet laments over his circumstances, being “weary with sorrow” (verse 28, NIV). He “clings to the dust” (verse 25a)—being oppressively crushed down (compare 44:24-25). He asks God to *revive* him (119:25b)—conveying the sense of *saving from death*. The Hebrew word means to *restore* or *renew*—to *breathe new life* into something. Thus, the psalmist turns to God for renewal at a time of terrible despondency.

The writer has opened up to God, declaring His ways (verse 26)—that is, His circumstances and how he has been responding to them—and knows that God has answered him, helping him to remain properly focused. He asks that God would further teach him (same verse) and increase his understanding (verse 27) of how to apply God's laws at this time. We may generally understand God's laws but often will need more direct instruction and encouragement in difficult circumstances.

The plea “Remove from me the way of lying” (verse 29) or “Keep me from deceitful ways” (NIV) could refer either to being personally kept away from this wrong way or to be protected from others who are slandering. The psalmist himself is committed to remaining truthful and faithful—and to looking to God's judgments to govern his life (verse 30).

The end of verse 29, “Grant me Your law graciously,” runs counter to those who claim that law and grace do not go together. As commentator Wiersbe remarks: “‘Law and grace are in opposition!’ many declare, but the psalmist testified that law and grace worked together in his life (vv. 29 and 58). God used Moses to liberate the people from Egypt, but then God gave Moses the law to give to Israel at Sinai. The German philosopher Goethe wrote, ‘Whatever liberates our spirit without giving us self-control is disastrous.’ Law and grace are not enemies, for law sets the standard and grace enables us to meet it (Rom. 8:1-3)” (introductory notes on Psalm 119).

Having been forced to, as we saw, cling to the dust (verse 25), the poet resolves that inwardly he will cling to God's laws as he prays that God will not let him fall into shame and dishonor (verse 31).

He concludes this stanza with the metaphor of running the course of God's commandments with an enlarged heart (verse 32). Some see the enlarged heart as signifying increased joy or understanding—and it may, as an increased heart or mind could signify greater depth of understanding (compare 1 Corinthians 2:10-14). But in connection with running a course, the imagery more likely seems to concern spiritual power. In a physical sense, we can perhaps imagine a person running so hard that his heart gives out. Yet here God gives a new heart—a bigger, stronger, more powerful heart (a spiritual heart empowered by God's Holy Spirit)—to enable the runner to run the course of God's way of life and not faint (compare Ezekiel 18:31; Isaiah 40:31).

In the *He* strophe (verses 33-40) the psalmist states his position in relationship to God. He is, he tells God, “Your servant, who is devoted to fearing You” (verse 38). His responsibility as the Lord's servant is

to properly revere God and wholeheartedly observe and keep God's law until the end of his life (verses 33-34). Yet, as in other verses, he understands his need for divine help to do God's will.

Jesus Christ explained to His disciples that they would need to abide in Him and let His words abide in them if they were to bear much fruit: "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me" (John 15:4).

The writer knows that while he must personally strive to do what God says, he must depend on God's help to succeed or his labor will be in vain (compare Psalm 127:1-2). Therefore he makes several requests of God. Two are knowledge-based: "teach me...the way" (verse 33) and "give me understanding" (verse 34). The author can read the law, but he needs God to teach him *the way*—to guide him in how to live the law every day, how to apply it, how to think and make decisions the way God thinks. He asks for *understanding* so that the law will be more than a legalistic code. He wants to live a principle-centered life based on knowing the spiritual intent of God's law.

Three of his requests are more in the realm of empowerment and motivation. He needs God's power to do what is right: "make me walk" (verse 35), "incline my heart" (verse 36), "turn my eyes away" (verse 37). Not that God would force upon the psalmist a course of action, but that He would motivate and strengthen the writer's will in the sense that the apostle Paul describes: "For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13).

The psalmist is particularly attuned to the danger of covetousness—of letting wrong attraction to worldly things of no ultimate spiritual value detract him from God's way (verses 36-37)—and so must we be. Covetousness is forbidden in the last of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:17; Deuteronomy 5:21). Interestingly, this command regulates thoughts in the mind—showing the spiritual nature of God's law even in Old Testament times. Jesus also warns us, "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses" (Luke 12:15). We must instead focus on what we really need—God's spiritual blessings.

The poet sums up with his longing for God's laws and a prayer that God will enable him to live by them—revitalizing him to walk in the right way (verse 40).

### **"The Cords of the Wicked Have Bound Me;**

### **But I Have Not Forgotten Your Law" (Psalm 119:41-88)**

**January 26-27**

In the *Waw* strophe (verses 41-48) the psalmist prays for God's promised deliverance (verse 41; compare verse 49) so that he will be able to continue to live by God's law (verse 44) and to proclaim God's words to others—to his detractors (verse 42) and to kings (verse 46). This could imply that the writer was himself a prophet such as Jeremiah, yet others take it merely to mean that the writer, or anyone, should be able to unabashedly discuss their Bible-based beliefs when asked to defend them, even in the presence of kings (compare Matthew 10:18-20; Luke 21:12-15; 1 Peter 3:15-16).

The words of Psalm 119:43, "Take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth," are paraphrased in *The Living Bible* as: "May I never forget your words." Yet they may more specifically be asking that God not allow the psalmist's proclamation of God's truth to others to cease by being silenced in prison or death.

Through God's intervention the author will be able to live by God's law "forever and ever" (verse 44)—clearly demonstrating his belief in eternal life as the reward of the righteous. This is part of the liberating aspect of God's law, as described in the next verse.

The Hebrew word in verse 45 translated "liberty" or "freedom" (NIV) literally means "a wide space"—metaphorically meaning unconfined by suffering or oppression. The apostle James referred to God's law as "the perfect law of liberty" (James 1:25). John said that God's commandments "are not burdensome" (1 John 5:3). "The psalmist celebrates the freedom that is found in obeying God's instruction. Although many think of laws, instructions, and commandments (v. 47) as limiting and restricting, the Law of God paradoxically frees us. It frees us from sin (v. 133) and gives us the peace that comes from following the Lord's instructions (v. 165)" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on Psalm 119:44-45). Moreover, it leads to the ultimate freedom, found in Christ, of reigning in God's Kingdom forever—liberated for eternity from death and all the burdens and sorrows of this present life.

The poet closes the stanza with two expressions of love for God's commandments and a commitment to meditate on His statutes.

In the *Zayin* strophe (verses 49-56) the psalmist asks God to “remember” the word that caused him to have hope. The psalmist doesn’t remind God of which promise comprises *the word*, but it likely involves the promise of salvation or deliverance (compare verse 41). Of course, God knows what is meant. “When applied to the Lord, the word ‘remember’ means ‘to pay attention to, to work on behalf of.’ . . . Remembering is not recalling, for God never forgets; it is relating to His people in a special way” (Wiersbe, *Be Exultant*, note on verses 49-56). This hope—that God would work out a specific promise—comforted the psalmist in his affliction and enlivened him (verse 50).

His present affliction (same verse) involves proud, wicked men who hold him in contempt (verses 51, 53). Some aspect of God’s law is at issue. The adversaries have forsaken the law and deride the author for his faith. “Yet,” he says, “I do not turn aside from Your law” (verse 51). He is angry: “Indignation grips me because of the wicked” (verse 53, NIV; compare verse 139). But he directs his thoughts toward God’s statutes (verse 54). They become his songs, subjects for composing praises to God—as they indeed form the basis for this very psalm (compare Ephesians 5:19).

The phrase “in the house of my pilgrimage,” literally “in my temporary house” (*Zondervan NIV Study Bible*, note on Psalm 119:54), identifies life as a journey. As a stranger and pilgrim on the earth (see verse 19), the psalmist sings praises to God wherever he finds himself.

In declaring to God, “I remember Your name in the night” (verse 55), the writer shows that his religion is not just an outward show during the day. He thinks about God and all He stands for at night (compare verses 62, 148) when he is reflecting on what is important to him—and He resolves to obey Him.

The psalmist ends the strophe by stating that God’s law “has become mine.” In essence, he has internalized it to an extent that it is *his* way of living—not just God’s way, not just his parents’ way. By keeping the law of God, he has made it his own (verse 56).

In the *Heth* strophe (verses 57-64) the poet proclaims, “You are my portion, O LORD” (verse 57). As commentator Wiersbe notes: “This is real estate language and refers to the apportioning of the land of Canaan to the tribes of Israel (78:55; Josh. 13–21). The priests and Levites were not given an inheritance in the land because the Lord was their inheritance and their portion (Num. 18:20-24; Deut. 10:8-9; 12:12). Jeremiah, the priest called to be a prophet, called the Lord ‘the portion of Jacob’ [i.e., of all Israel] (Jer. 10:16; 51:19; Lam. 3:24), and David used the same image in Psalm 16:5-6” (note on 119:57-64). Christians today should consider God as *our* portion, through whom all our needs and wants are supplied for eternity.

Because he knew that the Lord was his portion, the psalmist requests God’s favor and mercy (verse 58). He “made haste” and “did not delay” to bring his life into harmony with God’s ways, obeying His commandments (verses 59-60). These words are instructive. We should always be quick to follow God’s commands. And whenever our lives fall out of harmony with God’s ways, we must not put off repentance—imagining we will eventually get around to it, letting ourselves drift farther and farther away from God—for we thereby jeopardize our future (see Hebrews 2:1-3). If your life is going that way, ask God to help you turn around. Do it today. Don’t wait for a tomorrow that may never come.

The psalmist’s enemies had no regard for God’s law, and they bound him in cords (Psalm 119:61). This could be figurative of some type of ensnarement, or it may refer more literally to bondage and imprisonment—such as what Jeremiah experienced. Yet despite his predicament, the writer holds fast to God’s law and gives thanks to God for it in the middle of the night (verses 61-62; compare verse 55).

The author is at great odds with his lawless oppressors but sees as companions all those who fear and obey God (verse 63). He realizes he is not alone in his struggle (compare verses 74, 79)—and that was no doubt a source of encouragement, as it should be to all of us today. He further recognizes that in spite of his present troubles, the earth is still full of God’s *hesed*, his lovingkindness and mercy (verse 64).

In the *Teth* strophe (verses 65-72) the psalmist focuses on God dealing “well” (Hebrew *tob*, “good”) with him (verse 65), admitting that he went astray in some manner before his present affliction and that this led to his repentance (verse 67)—which he sees as *tob*, good (verse 71).

The Hebrew word *tob* is used six times in this stanza. The psalmist declares that God *is* good and *does* good (verse 68). In verse 72, he states that God’s law *is better* (from *tob*—i.e., “more good”) than treasure (compare verses 14, 127, 162).

The poet calls his enemies “proud.” He states that they have “forged a lie against me” and later that they “almost made an end of me on earth” (verse 87). He says their hearts are “fat as grease” (verse 70)—or “fat, without feeling” (Green’s Literal Translation). The imagery is that of being covered in thick fat and difficult to penetrate. The NIV substitutes “callous” for “fat.” Yet, in spite of being persecuted, the psalmist will keep God’s precepts and delight in His law (verses 69-70).

He learned from his earlier mistake and from the correction that resulted. Undoubtedly it was not pleasant to live through the situation. The writer can look back, however, and say that it was “good”—that it was more than worth it (verses 71-72; compare verse 75). He recognized it as the opportunity for spiritual growth that it was.

As the book of Hebrews tells us, “Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (12:11; see verses 5-11).

In the *Yod* strophe (verses 73-80) the psalmist recognizes that God as man’s Maker is the One who best understands how man, His creation, is supposed to properly function—so he seeks God’s direction in how to live (verse 73).

The writer desires to encourage others who revere God by maintaining hope in God’s Word through his affliction and continuing in obedience (see verses 74, 79; compare verse 63). He knows that God has allowed his present affliction and that His judgments have been right (verse 75). Yet he now prays for relief and comfort, as God has promised (verse 76). This will be a powerful witness to God’s people—and so will the final outcome of all this.

The poet reiterates that his enemies are proud and continues the pattern of contrasting their wrongdoing with His faithfulness: “They treated me wrongfully...but I will meditate on Your precepts” (verse 78). “They have forged a lie against me, but I will keep your precepts” (verse 69). They “have bound me...but I have not forgotten Your law” (verse 61). They “have me in derision...yet I do not turn aside from Your law” (verse 51).

He chooses to let God deal with his enemies while he finds comfort in the law, striving to be blameless, praying that they will be put to shame rather than him (verses 78, 80)—again as part of an important witness to all of God’s people.

The *Kaph* stanza (verses 81-88), the last strophe of the first half of the psalm, is—like the ending stanza (verses 196-176)—dominated by prayer for God’s intervention. Wearying under his trial, the psalmist searches God’s Word and wonders, in the manner of a lament, “When will you comfort me?” (verses 81-82).

He feels “like a wineskin in smoke” (verse 83). “As a wineskin hanging in the smoke and heat above a fire becomes smudged and shriveled, so the psalmist bears the marks of his affliction” (*Zondervan NIV Study Bible*, note on verse 83).

The first question of verse 84, “How many are the days of Your servant?,” may mean, as the NIV renders it, “How long must your servant wait?” But it may also refer to how many days of life he has remaining in him under these circumstances. He would then be asking, “How long can I survive like this?”

“When,” he further pleads, “will You execute judgment on those who persecute me?” (same verse). Essentially, he is asking God, “When will You deal with these people? When will You put a stop to what they’re doing to me?”

Their digging of pits for him (verse 85) is probably figurative of setting situational traps for him—evidently to the point of plotting his death (compare verse 87). He cries out for help to avert this dire threat (verse 86), once more contrasting the behavior of his persecutors with his own: “They almost made an end of me on earth, but I did not forsake Your precepts” (verse 87). Through all this he hasn’t turned his back on God’s law, but he asks renewed strength to continue keeping it (verse 88). Again, we see that continuance in obedience to the law of God requires His caring attention and help. In this we also see that doing right doesn’t come automatically, even to those who love God. We cannot succeed on our own strength; we need to reach out to God and His Word continually.

**“Oh, How I Love Your Law!” (Psalm 119:89-128)****January 28-29**

The *Lamed* stanza (verses 89-96), which begins the second half of the psalm, starts with a three-verse introduction to this half that teaches a general truth—that “God’s sovereign and unchanging word governs and maintains all creation” (*Zondervan NIV Study Bible*, note on verses 89-91). These verses strengthen the parallel between this psalm and Psalm 19. *The Nelson Study Bible* comments: “The stability of the universe, or the *heaven*, mirrors God’s *faithfulness*, love, and care. But even more important, it reflects the permanence of God’s laws and the fact that the universe serves Him” (note on 119:89-91).

The phrase “for all are Your servants” (verse 91) refers back to the things just mentioned. The NIV renders it as, “for all things serve you.” The existence of heaven and earth, natural laws, the regularity of day and night, and the progression of the seasons are all things that *serve* the Lord. All creatures, including all thinking beings, in a sense serve God. Even those who are opposed to God’s will today ultimately serve His purposes. For one, they too serve as a witness to the inexorable constancy of His laws—His *spiritual* laws of conduct. It is sometimes said that you can’t really break God’s spiritual laws, anymore than you can break his physical laws such as gravity. If you try to contravene such laws, they will instead *break you*. It is essentially pointless to defy God. His purposes will still stand—forever. And in the end, all will be led to willingly conform to His ways or be removed from the picture.

The psalmist recognizes God’s sovereignty and is happy to be part of the universe that serves His will, finding delight in God’s law and knowing that if he did not, he would not have made it through to where he is now (verse 92). God’s laws have preserved him (verse 93), and he asks for God to *continue* to preserve him. As the Lord’s willing servant striving to obey, the poet utters another plea for deliverance from the enemies who want to destroy him (verses 94-95). Yet even in his trial and cry for help, the major focus is still on resolving to continue in God’s ways.

He closes the stanza with this most remarkable statement in verse 96: “I have seen the consummation of all perfection [probably referring back to the physical creation and its laws, as described in verses 89-91], but your commandment is exceedingly broad.” That is, *it is bigger than the universe*, providing an inexhaustible source of wise counsel on how to live, a subject given further treatment in the stanza that follows. Thus we should clearly see that even God’s Old Testament law was to be understood and applied not merely in the letter, but in the fullness of its spirit and intent. Furthermore, we should consider that we could not run out of things to study and learn about God’s Word and His laws in countless lifetimes.

In the *Mem* strophe (verses 97-104) the psalmist devotes the whole stanza to his love for God’s law. Unlike all of the other stanzas following the second one, he makes no requests for help or lament over his treatment by his enemies. He pours out his feelings in a grand hymn of praise, declaring his love for God’s law—that it is his constant meditation (verses 97, 99).

This is reminiscent of the description of the blessed righteous man at the very outset of the book of Psalms: “His delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night” (1:2). However, there the Hebrew word for “meditate” is one derived from the sound of musing, while the word used here (and in 119:15) more explicitly means reflection or contemplation—derived from a term that means uttering, in the sense of speaking to oneself. The point in both cases is that we are to constantly mull over God’s law, being thankful for it and considering how to apply it as we go through every day.

The author recognizes that God’s commandments make him wiser than his enemies (verse 98). They, with their cunning and craftiness and worldly success, may seem to have the upper hand at this time, but there is no question that he has made the smarter life choice by following God’s ways. Even at this time, the wicked do not experience the true happiness that comes from living right and absolute confidence in the future. And in that future, divine judgment and reward lie in store.

Indeed, studying and living by God’s laws provides the best life education possible. The psalmist says he has more understanding than his teachers—perhaps teachers he had years ago—and more than “the ancients” (verses 99-100). Most translations consider this latter term to mean not those who lived long before but those who are aged—elders.

Parallel to verse 98, the writer seems to be declaring himself wiser than his teachers and elders. This would certainly make sense if he were raised in a time of apostasy. Jeremiah, for instance, was plotted against by those of his own priestly hometown—including those who would have been his teachers and elders.

However, it is possible that the psalmist simply means he has come to understand far more than what he *received from* his teachers and elders. He may have learned some valuable things from teachers, wise elders and others in his community. But this does not compare to what he has learned through directly studying God’s law and living by it, developing a loving relationship with the Lawgiver. What the Lord Himself taught him (verse 102; compare verse 24)—through scriptural revelation, inspiration and life experiences—is far more than he learned, or ever *could* learn, from other people.

Verse 101 gives us the important principle of practicing self-control—exercising willpower to restrain ourselves from wrongdoing. Having *access* to spiritual power is not enough, for God will not force us to act in accordance with His commands. We must be *willing* to follow His commands and follow through. This comes from learning to really *love* God’s ways—to desire them as we desire the pleasure of eating something that tastes good (compare verse 103)—and learning to hate evil (verses 104, 128). Humbly studying God’s Word will help to shape our way of thinking in these regards.

In the *Nun* strophe (verses 105-112) the psalmist begins by stating that God’s word is a “lamp” and a “light” to show him the right path (verse 105). It is a light in the sense that it provides understanding (see verse 130)—as in the English metaphorical terms *enlightenment* and *illumination*. Without the guidance God’s law gives, we would have to grope blindly through a dark world on our own. Yet through God’s revelation we can properly see. Many scriptural passages declare God Himself as well as His truth and ways to be light. All who are His people have been “called...out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9). And we are to “walk in the light as He is in the light” (1 John 5:7). Light is also representative throughout Scripture of life and blessing.

The writer had sworn (“taken an oath,” NIV) and reaffirmed often, “I will keep Your righteous judgments” (verse 106). The taking of an oath was a serious matter, for “an oath is really a conditional curse which a man calls down upon himself from God, in the case of his not speaking the truth or not keeping a promise” (*Hastings Dictionary of the Bible*, “Oaths”). The law addressed this subject: “If a man makes a vow to the LORD, or swears an oath to bind himself by some agreement, he shall not break his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth” (Numbers 30:2). The author had personally covenanted with God to serve Him, and he remained committed to this promise.

He again mentions his present affliction, praying to be revived (verse 107). Yet even as he does, he asks that God would accept the “freewill offerings” of his mouth—referring to praise, thanks and statements of commitment—and continue to instruct him (verse 108).

He says that he constantly takes his life in his hands (verse 109). If he were a prophet of God bearing an unpopular message or a counselor of government officials who hated him, the performance of his duties would indeed require him to “lay his life on the line.” Yet even despite this and the plotting of his enemies (verse 110), he has not turned away from God’s way—and *will* not.

He closes by referring to God’s testimonies as his “heritage” (verse 111)—recalling his earlier statements that the Lord was his “portion” (verse 57), his inheritance—a wonderful gift that he will rejoice in forever.

In the *Samek* strophe (verses 113-120) the psalmist declares his stand with God against those who won’t obey God’s laws. His statement, “I hate double-minded men” (verse 113, NIV), should be understood in the sense of rejecting them as God does. Note his address to evildoers to get away from him (verse 115) and his recognition that God rejects the wicked (verses 118-119). The point is that the poet wants nothing to do with them, looking on them as his enemies because they are God’s enemies (compare 26:5; 31:6; 139:21-22). Of course, this does not preclude the possibility of such people repenting—and it does not negate our responsibility to pray that they do. Jesus gave us the instruction of praying for our enemies (Matthew 5:43-44), and the best thing we could pray for them is that they repent—though this could require correction from God.

We should understand that a double-minded man, as mentioned in Psalm 119:113, is undecided, uncommitted, inconsistent, wishy-washy, much as were the people to whom Elijah spoke on Mount Carmel: “How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him” (1 Kings 18:21). “A double-minded man [is] unstable in all his ways” (James 1:8). This is unacceptable when it comes to God. He will accept nothing less than full commitment.

It is not clear if the writer is referring to specific people here or if he is just providing a general contrast with his own, fully committed attitude of loving God's law (Psalm 119:113). It may be that there were some at the time who could not make up their minds on whether to support him in his righteous cause—or perhaps they would offer support and then not follow through. Perhaps there were compromisers among supposed friends who wanted him to comply with some of the demands of his enemies—thus making these friends enemies themselves.

Hoping and trusting in God's promises of protection (verse 114), the psalmist prays to be sustained through his present dilemma, determined to continue in obedience to God (verses 116-118). He trusts that God will deal with the wicked, realizing that they will be "put away...like dross" (verses 118-119)—that is, like the scum cleared off the top of molten metal (compare Ezekiel 22:18-19).

In light of God's righteous judgments against evil that are sure to come, the author trembles in awe (verse 120)—soberly respectful and appropriately fearful of the consequences of disobeying the Almighty Judge.

In the *Ayin* strophe (verses 121-128) the psalmist emphasizes that he is the Lord's servant (verses 122, 124-125), who has acted faithfully, and he pleads for the Lord to now act to save him from his oppressors.

As a servant looking to his master (compare 123:2), the writer asks God to be his "surety...for good" (119:122). "A person became surety when he or she pledged to pay another person's debt or fulfill a promise [if need be]" (Wiersbe, *Be Exultant*, note on verses 121-128). Job also asked for God to be surety for him (Job 17:3). So did Hezekiah, praying to God, "Stand surety for me" (Isaiah 38:14, NEB, REB). The book of Genesis gives us the example of Judah standing as surety for his brother Benjamin (Genesis 44:32)—willing to become an Egyptian slave in his stead so that Benjamin could return free to their father Jacob (see 43:1-10; 44:18-34).

The author is essentially asking God to put Himself on the line as the guarantee for His servant's deliverance. We can view this beyond the immediate circumstances of the psalm's composition. In its note on Psalm 119:122, *John Gill's Exposition on the Whole Bible* points out that what the psalmist "prays to God to be for him, that [is what] Christ is for all his people, [see] Heb 7:22. He drew nigh to God, struck hands [in agreement] with him, gave his word and bond to pay the debts of his people; put himself in their legal place and stead, and became responsible to law and justice for them; engaged [in work] to make satisfaction for their sins, to bring in everlasting righteousness for their justification, and to preserve and keep them, and bring them safe to eternal glory and happiness; and this was being a surety for them for good."

The poet's eyes have failed, from exhaustion and probably tears, in looking for God's salvation (verse 123; compare verse 136). He asks for God to deal with him according to His *hesed*—His covenant love (verse 124). On that basis, the psalmist declares that it is time for God to act, to at last intervene, to stop the oppressors from the blasphemy they have been perpetrating—that of pronouncing God's law void through their ability to so mistreat His servant with impunity (verse 126).

In all this, the writer is still keen to better understand God's laws, and he declares his great love for God's commands and the tremendous value he places on them (verse 127, compare verses 14, 72, 162). He knows that God's way is right, and, as in verse 104, he hates every false way (verse 163).

### **"Great Peace Have Those Who Love Your Law, and Nothing Causes Them to Stumble" (Psalm 119:129-176)**

**January 30-31**

In the *Pe* stanza (verses 129-136) the psalmist begins with the wonder of God's Word and ends with anguish over people not obeying it.

Verse 130 in the NKJV says, "The entrance of Your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple." The word translated "entrance" literally means "opening." Some versions render it as "unfolding" (NIV, NASB, NRSV). The parallelism here shows "light" to signify understanding, as in verse 105. The idea in verse 130 might merely be that of unrolling a scroll of Scripture, or opening up a Bible today, so as to read it and gain understanding. Yet it could more figuratively signify God opening up the *meaning* of Scripture to a person's mind. After Jesus explained the Old Testament Scriptures to His companions on the road to Emmaus, they remarked, "Were not our hearts burning within us while He talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" (Luke 24:32).

“Simple” in Psalm 119:130 may have the same sense as its occurrence in 116:6—meaning uncomplicated through guile, and thus straightforward and innocent. Yet it might also indicate those looked on as uneducated—here receiving a far *superior* education through God’s Word and inspiration (compare John 7:14-16; Luke 10:21; Acts 4:13; 1 Corinthians 1:18–2:16).

The poet likens his desire for God’s commandments to panting with thirst (Psalm 119:131), recalling imagery used in other psalms (42:1-2; 63:1). Jesus said, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled” (Matthew 5:6).

The author next makes an appeal to God’s mercy on the basis of this being God’s “custom” toward those who love Him (Psalm 119:132). In fact, the word translated “custom” here is *mishpat*, the term for God’s legal judgments throughout the psalm. This is in fact God’s law for Himself—part of His personal inviolable code of conduct. Indeed, this is codified in the Ten Commandments, where God promises to show mercy to those who love Him (see Exodus 20:6).

It is interesting to note in the next verses (Psalm 119:133-134) that the psalmist prays to be kept free from sin before then asking to be freed (redeemed, bought back—compare verse 154) from human oppression—and even in the latter case, the request is so that he may continue to live a life of obedience to God. God redeems us today from sin and affliction for this same purpose—that we may live in accordance with His will.

The phrase “Make Your face shine upon Your servant” (verse 135a) is adapted from the priestly blessing that God said was to be used to bless His people (see Numbers 6:25). The symbolism of shining light would seem to tie back to the light of understanding in Psalm 119:130—and indeed we see the plea for this blessing followed by a renewed request to be taught God’s statutes (verse 135b).

The stanza ends with the poet lamenting that he has shed many tears because of people not obeying God’s law (verse 136). It is not clear whether he is referring to his own suffering from those committing lawless deeds in abusing him (compare verses 121-123, 126, 134) or whether he is referring to people in general dishonoring God and hurting *themselves* through their sins—a great tragedy over which to mourn (compare Jeremiah 9:1; Ezekiel 9:4; Luke 19:41-42; Philippians 3:18).

In the *Tsaddé* strophe (verses 137-144) the psalmist uses the words “righteous” and “righteousness” five times in connection with God and His Word—these terms in the original Hebrew connoting a straight line, perfect alignment. God’s testimonies are also “very faithful” (verse 138)—“fully trustworthy” (NIV). His Word, in its commands and promises, is “very pure” (verse 140)—in the sense of “thoroughly tested” (NIV; compare 12:6). The author speaks from personally experiencing the benefits of God’s Word (see verses 97-104).

Verse 139, “My zeal has consumed me, because my enemies have forgotten Your words,” could mean either that their disobedience has further incited him to take a stand against them (compare verse 53) or that his suffering at their hands has ultimately served to strengthen him in his resolve to follow God. (Compare also Psalm 69:9; John 2:17).

Although the poet feels “small and despised” and “trouble and anguish have overtaken” him (verses 141, 143), he remembers God’s precepts. In contrast to the trouble brought on him through false accusations (verses 118, 86, 69), God’s “law is truth” (verse 142)—genuine, dependable and right (compare verses 151, 160)—and His commandments bring true happiness and joy (verse 143). Like the psalmist’s, all our present troubles are temporary, but God’s righteousness is everlasting—and through God’s Word we will live a life of everlasting righteousness (see verses 142, 144).

In the *Qoph* stanza (verses 145-152) the psalmist cries out desperately to God for help (verse 145-147), similar to his intense prayer in the earlier *Kaph* stanza (see verses 81-88). This intensity continues through the next three stanzas that close the psalm. Commentator Wiersbe remarks: “Have you noticed that the writer became more urgent as he drew near the end of the psalm? The Hebrew alphabet was about to end, but his trials would continue, and he needed the help of the Lord” (note on verses 153-160). The author still expresses his determination to continue in God’s ways, but he knows that he cannot succeed—indeed, he cannot even live to try—without God’s intervention and help.

He gets up early and lies awake late at night—through the night watches (sunset to 10, 10 to 2, and 2 to dawn)—crying to God for help and meditating on God’s Word, in which he finds hope (verses 147-148; compare 5:3; 63:1, 6).

He asks again that God *revive* him (verse 149; compare verses 25, 37, 40, 88, 107, as well as 154, 156, 159)—to breathe life into him, to restore his spirits, to reawaken his hope. And this prayer in verse 149 is made according to God’s *hesed* (covenant lovingkindness) and *mishpat* (judgment, rule for life)—reiterating his appeals in verses 124 and 132.

He then again presents the issue of his enemies. They draw near to him—that is, they are coming for him, to do him harm—and are thus far from God’s law (verse 150). Yet God is near, able to intervene (verse 151; compare Acts 17:27-28). And since God’s words are truth—true and faithful forever, as the poet closes this stanza (Psalm 119:152)—then God must intervene as He has promised in his law. Of course, God is not bound as to the manner of His intervention. Ultimately, He will work all things out to the eternal benefit of His servants (see Romans 8:28).

In the **Resh** strophe (verses 153-160) the psalmist three times asks God to “revive” him—to lift his spirits and see to his needs—here, as in other places, according to God’s word, His judgments and His loyal lovingkindness (verses 154, 156, 159). In essence, the author is pleading with God to act because God has promised to, because this is what God’s own laws demand and because God, in His care for His people, cannot fail to be moved by their plight with love and compassion to help them.

He asks God to plead or defend his cause in the manner of an advocate and mediator in a court of law (verse 154; compare 1 Samuel 24:15; Psalms 35:1; 43:1). And in his adversaries’ case against him, they are the ones without a leg to stand on—having no legitimate cause against him, being lawbreakers themselves and having no one to stand for them, help them and save them. Moreover, God could override all of this by taking a further step.

The writer again asks God to *redeem* him (119:154; compare verse 134). To “redeem” means to “buy back,” to “deliver by paying a price.” God stated that a kinsman could buy back the property a poor relative had sold (Leviticus 25:25-28), as Boaz did on behalf of Naomi and Ruth. The language here is interesting in light of the psalmist’s earlier request that God stand as surety for him (verse 122). Yet this goes even further. While the terminology of redemption often takes on in the Old Testament a general sense of deliverance from some overpowering circumstance, there is behind all this the legal foundation. There was a price for God to pay to redeem His people from the consequences of sin—a price paid through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The psalmist was ultimately reliant on this same redemption, which in his day was yet to come. Whether this was in his mind at the time or not, it was no doubt in the mind of the One who inspired the psalm.

Despite the many who oppose him, the psalmist is intent on staying the course of following God (verse 157). He is utterly disgusted by their treachery against God in the way they have rejected God’s Word (verse 158). The Israelite nation was founded on Scripture, and yet the people and their leaders spurned its teachings. How true that is even today! The Israelite nations of today have, to varying degrees, been founded on scriptural principles. U.S. President Andrew Jackson said the Bible is “the rock on which our republic rests.” And our countries have been immeasurably blessed by God. Yet today we see terrible treachery, as even in America displays of His commandments are unceremoniously marched out of courthouses by judicial decree. Even worse, many of God’s laws are rejected by those who still profess to follow Him.

The poet ends the stanza with another declaration that God’s Word is truth (verse 160). The Hebrew word rendered “entirety” here is *rosh*, which typically means “head.” The King James Version translates this as “beginning.” The focus here would be that God’s Word has always been true and, as the rest of the verse maintains, it always will be. But others see *rosh* here as designating the “sum,” in the sense of summit or summation, thus explaining NKJV translation. This is the third declaration of the truth of God’s Word in close proximity—the other two occurring in each of the two previous stanzas (verses 142, 151). Jesus Christ affirmed this when He prayed to God the Father, “Your word is truth” (John 17:17). And in the certainty of His Word, its righteous judgments apply forever (Psalm 119:160). This should be a cause of concern to those who choose to reject God and His laws—and a cause of great hope to those who strive to follow God in keeping His Word.

In the **Shin** stanza (verses 161-168) the psalmist pauses from his crying out for help to again place his affliction in the context of God’s Word: “Princes persecute me without a cause, but my heart stands in awe of Your word” (verse 161). He again rejoices in God’s Word as a great treasure (verse 162; compare

verses 14, 72, 127; see also Matthew 13:45-46). And he yet again proclaims, “I love Your law” (Psalm 119:163).

Praising “seven times a day” in verse 164 could be literal, but it more likely is meant in a figurative sense for “throughout the day”—the number seven representing completeness. It exceeded the typical three times per day mentioned elsewhere in Scripture (compare 55:17; Daniel 6:10-11). Most importantly note that these prayer times are times of *hallel* or “praise” for God’s righteous judgments. This is not talking about constantly crying out to God for help in the midst of affliction—which the writer has also been doing. Rather, it describes his constant praise of God even in these hard times. This is a wonderful example for all of God’s people.

The poet points out that all those who love God’s law find a great sense of peace (Psalm 119:165)—of security and well-being—in studying God’s teachings, meditating on them, practicing them. We find evidence of this sense of peace even in the midst of trial throughout the entirety of Psalm 119. In contrast to those who have only a superficial awareness of the law, or those who reject it (verse 126), the psalmist understands that the law will benefit him throughout life. For those who love God’s law, “nothing causes them to stumble” (verse 165). This is a better rendering in modern English than the King James Version’s “nothing shall offend them”—for this older translation might today appear to say that God’s people will never feel insulted or slighted—which is not at all what is intended by the original wording. The word *mikshol* here means a stumbling-block, an obstacle that causes one to fall. As long as God’s people maintain their love and devotion to living as He commands, they will not be tripped up by circumstances because the law, either directly or in principle, addresses whatever they encounter (compare Proverbs 4:12; 1 John 2:10).

The basis for the peace the writer experiences—just as it is for all God’s people—is trust in God’s promises about the future, knowing where life is headed beyond any present difficulties. As the next verse in Psalm 119 declares, “LORD, I hope for Your salvation” (verse 166). And the hope here is a *confident* one. Others translate the verse to say, “I wait for your salvation” (NIV). As he waits expectantly, the psalmist continues to remain devoted to all of God’s laws and follows them, recognizing that God is well aware of all he thinks and does (verses 166-168).

Finally in the *Tau* strophe (verses 169-176), the last stanza, the psalmist urgently summarizes his need and his steadfast devotion. With the alphabet exhausted, the poet fills his concluding strophe with repeated cries for help. In a barrage of petitions, he five times uses the word “let” along with the words “give,” “deliver” and “seek.” “Let my cry...[and] my supplication come before You,” he pleads (verses 169, 170). “Let Your hand...[and] Your judgments help me” (verses 173, 175). “Let my soul live” (verse 175). “Give me understanding” (verse 169). “Deliver me” (verse 170). “Seek your servant” (verse 176).

Verse 172 gives us an important definition of righteousness, stating that all of God’s commandments are righteousness—that is, the way of perfect alignment with Him. This is important for Christians today to understand in striving for righteousness. It means not only receiving forgiveness for past sin, but striving thereafter to live as God commands—to keep His commandments in their full spiritual intent as illustrated by Jesus Christ in the Sermon on the Mount. Of course, this is only possible with the help of God Himself—as the author well understood (see verse 35). Today we have the further revelation in the New Testament that this is accomplished through Jesus Christ living within us through the power of the Holy Spirit.

In verse 174 the psalmist again expresses his longing for God’s salvation—which could apply to immediate rescue or ultimate deliverance in the future resurrection to eternal life in the Kingdom of God. Perhaps both are intended.

In closing, the writer of this psalm sees himself like a lost sheep having strayed and now in need of rescue (verse 176). This may be an acknowledgment of sin (as his earlier one in verse 67), though he has not strayed in that way during his affliction (verse 110). It could simply be that he is saying that he’s in a predicament he can’t get out of—just as a lost sheep. This is certainly true when it comes to the human condition in terms of sin—and this simile is used elsewhere in that sense (compare Isaiah 53:6; 1 Peter 2:25; Luke 15:4-7). Whatever his exact meaning, the author desperately needs the intervention of the Good Shepherd to come and rescue His sheep—His follower, His servant.

This request is made on the basis of being a *faithful* servant—one who remembers God’s commandments. While he was clearly not sinless, the psalmist counted himself among the righteous. He

loved God's law and made it his chief delight (verse 174). His desire was to live and praise God (verses 171, 175). He integrated God's Word into his life. He walked in conformity to God's will in contrast with the unrighteous who had no desire to live obediently. God does not obligate Himself to aid the wicked. But He offers abundant help to His servants (Psalms 23; 121).

The belief that he was among the righteous whom God rewards gave the writer of Psalm 119 confidence to make his requests. And so it is with us today. For as the New Testament tells us in 1 John 3:22, "Whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight."

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