

An Exposition of Psalm 119

Introduction to Psalm 119

1. Psalm 119 is a feast on and in the Word of God.
2. Psalm type
3. Structure
4. Purpose
5. Words for the Word in Psalm 119
 - "The Law" (*Torah*)
 - "The Word" (*Dabar*)
 - "The Testimonies" (*ʿeduṯ*)
 - "The Commands/ments" (*miswa*)
 - "Judgments" (*Mishpot*)
 - "The Decrees" (*Huqqim*)
 - "The Precepts" (*Piqqudim*)
 - "The Word" or "Promise" (*ʿimra*)

Authorship

1. The authorship of this Psalm is important for interpreting a number of the sections (strophes). Although determining authorship is not ultimately important, it does add some significant interpretations and applications of the Psalm.
2. There is no superscription identifying the author in Psa 119. It is anonymous.
3. A few considerations make Daniel a good candidate.
4. Internal Evidence
 - Psa. 119:1-2 cf. Dan. 1:8-9
 - Psa. 119:9, 11, 30, 101 cf. Dan. 1:8
 - Psa. 119:19 cf. Dan. 1:3-4
 - Psa. 119:23, 78, 85, 86, 95, 110, 157, 161 cf. Dan. 3:8; 6:4-5
 - Psa 119:46 cf. Dan. 2:27-28
6. The "feel" of Daniel in Psalm 119
 - Examples: Psa. 119:17 cf. Dan. 1:12-16;

Psa 119:29 cf. Dan. 1:4;
Psa 119:36-37 cf Dan 2:48; 5:16;
Psa 119:63 cf. Dan 3:17-18;
Psa 119:87 cf Dan. 6:10, 16;
Psa. 119:98-100 cf Dan. 1:4, 17-20; 2:24;
Psa 119:119 cf Dan 6:24;
Psa. 119:136 cf Dan 9:5-6;
Psa 119:18, 27, 169 cf Dan. 9:1-3

7. Conclusion

The internal evidence seems to me to point *most consistently* to Daniel.

Themes of Psalm 119

1. Attributes of the Word

2. Benefits of the Word

3. Response to the Word

4. Is the Psalmist's attitude toward God's Law the same as Paul's?

Psa. 119:98 [25, 37, 40, 50, 88, 93, 107, 149, 154, 156, 159]

Cf. Rom. 7:9-10; 2 Cor. 3:5-9; Gal. 3:21 (not to mention, Rom. 3:20; Gal. 2:16).

Points to remember:

1. The Psalmists have in view a broader view of Law than Paul does.
2. The Psalmist rejoices in the Law's power to convict him of sin and turn him to God's mercy (Psa. 119:176). Paul rejoices in the same reality (Rom. 7:12, 22).
3. The Psalmist rejoices in God's Law as a regenerate person. He sees that grace comes before and empowers obedience (E.g., Psa. 119:10, 32, 36, 37, 88). There is no legalism in his approach to God's Law.

So everything the Psalmist says, we should be able to say.

Brief bibliography

See all the standard commentaries on the Psalms.

Charles Bridges, *Psalm 119*

Charles Spurgeon, *The Golden Alphabet*

John Calvin, *Sermons on Psalm 119*

Hwyel Jones, *Psalm 119 for Life*

James Boice, *Living by the Book*

George Zemek, *The Word of God in the Child of God:*

Exegetical, Theological and Homileteical Reflections on

Psalm 119 (knowledge of Hebrew is helpful).

Exposition of Psalm 119
Aleph (a) Stanza (1-8)
The Christian's Cry and Commitment

Introduction

I. The Blessedness of Obedience (1-3)

- A. Blessed are those

- B. Whose way is blameless/Who walk in the Law of the LORD
Blameless (cf. Gen. 17:1; Job 1:1; Prov. 11:20; 13:6)

- C. Who keep His testimonies/Seek Him with the whole heart
"His whole heart is engaged to know and love more and more" (Charles
Bridges, 4)

- D. Do no wrong/Walk in His ways

II. The Authority of the Word (4)

- A. You have ordained Your precepts

- B. That they be kept diligently

III. A Sincere Plea and Commitment (5-8)

- A. Oh that my ways may be established (5)

"This passionate exclamation pulsates with conviction, strong desire, and
an acute awareness of dependence" (Zemek, 74).

- B. Then I shall not be ashamed (6)

- C. The I shall praise You with an honest heart/
As I keep learning Your righteous judgments (7)

- D. I will/Do not (8)

"Firm in his purpose, but distrustful of his strength" (Bridges, 14-15).

1. What are our priorities and desires?
2. “The first attempt to render spiritual obedience will quickly convince us of our utter helplessness. We might as soon create a world, as create in our hearts one pulse of spiritual life” (Bridges, 9).

Ezek. 36:27

Bridges, “He who commands our duty, perfectly knows our weakness, and he who feels his own weakness if fully encouraged to depend upon the power of the Savior” (10).

Exposition of Psalm 119
Beth (b) Stanza (9-16)
The Believer's Path to Purity

Introduction:

“All the basics of personal sanctification are variously integrated into the curriculum of real life: God, the gracious Teacher; the psalmist, the dependent disciple; and the Textbook, the sufficient Word” (Zemek).

I. The Question and Answer Framework (9)

- A. How can a young man keep his way pure?

- B. By keeping it according to Your Word

II. Seek the Lord (10)

- A. With all my heart I seek you

- B. Do not let me wander from Your commandments

“The man of God exerts himself, but he does not trust himself. His heart is in his walking with God; but he knows that even his whole strength is not enough to keep him right unless his King shall be his keeper, and he who made the commands shall make him constant in obeying them” (CHS).

III. Treasure and Store His Word (11)

- A. Your Word I have treasured in my heart

Store up – Prov. 2:7; 10:14
Treasure – Prov. 2:1; 7:1

- B. That I might not sin against You

IV. Worship and learn (12)

A. Blessed are You Yahweh

B. Teach me Your statutes

V. Proclaim what is learned (13)

A. With my lips I have told of all the ordinances

B. of Your mouth

VI. Rejoice in the Word Lifestyle (14)

A. I have rejoiced in the way of Your testimonies
NET, *I rejoice in the lifestyle prescribed by your rules as if they were riches of all kinds.*

B. As much as in all riches
Dan. 2:46-48
Dan. 5:16-17, 29

VII. Meditate on the Word (15)

A. I will meditate on Your precepts

B. And fix my eyes on Your ways

VIII. Delight in the Word (16)

A. I will delight myself in Your statutes

B. I do not forget Your Word

Application

Exposition of Psalm 119
Gimmel (g) Stanza (17-24)
Dealing with Hostility and Pressure

Introduction

“The suppliant prays this whole prayer presupposing pressure and harassment”
(Goldingay, 389).

I. Petition for God’s Abundant Supply (17)

- A. Petition: deal bountifully with Your servant

- B. Results
 - 1. That I may live

 - 2. And keep Your Word

II. Petition for Illumination from the Word (18-20)

- A. Open my eyes (18)

- B. I am exile in the land (19)

- C. Do not conceal

“But now I must ask myself whether I am so guided by my own principles that I might not even notice if God withdrew His living commandment from me one day” (Bonhoeffer).

- D. Desperation (20)

III. How God Deals with the Arrogant (21)

- A. God rebukes the arrogant the accursed ones
Who wander from Your commands

- B. If this is an exile (Daniel) then he is talking about fellow Jews.
Dan 9:7

IV. Prayer for Deliverance from Hostile Opponents (22-23)

- A. Take away scorn and contempt from me

- B. For I observe your testimonies (decrees/rules).
Boice, “What is unique about these specific trials is that they seem to have come to the Psalmist because of his determination to adhere to God’s Word” (33).

- C. Princes plot and speak against me
Cf. 161
The princes are the policy-makers of the foreign land.
Dan. 6:3-6

- D. Your servant meditates on Your statutes

“(Meditation) us the digestive faculty of the soul, which converts the word into real and proper nourishment: so that this revolving of a single verse in our minds is often better than the mere reading of whole chapters.”
Bridges

V. Declaration of Confidence in the Word (24)

- A. Your testimonies are my delight

- B. They are my counselors

Application

Exposition of Psalm 119
Daleth (d) Stanza (25-32)
Grace to Stick When Stuck

Introduction

I. My soul is stuck to the dirt (25-27)

A. The first lament: I am stuck to the dirt (25a)

B. The first petition: Revive me according to Your Word (25b)

“Breathe into me thine own life, that I may rise from the dust and cleave to thee. This cry for quickening grace is the exercise of faith” (Bridges, 57).

C. Recollection and second petition (26)

D. Third Petition and outcome (27)

II. I am dissolved in tears (28-29)

A. Second lament (28a)

B. First petition (28b)

Strengthen me according to Your Word

“The child of God was in desperate need of new strength, spiritual reinforcement, and again, on account of the precedent of promise, he was not hesitant to ask for it. So ask for it he did, both boldly and expectantly” (Zemek, 123).

“The blessed word will supply all their need – life for their quickening, light for their direction, comfort for their enjoyment, strength for their support” (Bridges, 67).

C. Second petition (29a)

D. Third petition (29b)

III. I stick to Your Word (30-32)

A. Expression of determination (30)

B. I stick to Your Word

C. Running with an enlarged heart (32)

Exposition of Psalm 119
He (h) Stanza (33-40)
A New Covenant Prayer

Introduction

I. Lord Teach Me (33-34)

- A. The petition
 - 1. Teach me/Give me understanding
 - 2. The way of Your statutes/Your Law
- B. The Consequences
And I shall observe it to the end/
Observe/keep with all my heart

II. Lord Change My Heart (35-36)

- A. The petition: Walk
 - 1. Make me walk
 - 2. In the path of Your commandments
 - 3. For I delight in it
- B. The petition: Incline
 - 1. Incline my heart
 - 2. To Your testimonies
 - 3. And not to material gain

III. Lord, Protect My Eyes (37)

- A. The petition: Turn my eyes
 - 1. Turn my eyes

2. From looking at vanity

B. The petition: Revive me

IV. Lord Confirm Your Word (38)

A. The petition

1. Confirm

2. Word

B. The result

As that which produces fear for You

V. Lord Take Away My Disgrace (39)

A. The petition: take away my disgrace

B. For Your ordinances are good

VI. Lord, Revive Me (40)

A. Desire: I long for Your precepts

B. Petition: Revive me through Your righteousness

Make this a prayer for yourself and for your loved ones.

Exposition of Psalm 119
Vav (w) Stanza (41-48)
A Faithful Witness

Introduction

1. Our witness
2. Daniel's witness
"He prays for the grace of true fearlessly joyful confession" (Delitzsch, 249).

I. God's love and a Good Response (41-42)

- A. Appeal to experience Yahweh's *hesed*
- B. For the sake of a good response

II. Put Your Word of Truth in My Mouth (43-44)

- A. Do not take the Word utterly out of my mouth
- B. Whole-hearted obedience

III. Freedom and No Shame (45-46)

- A. I will walk at liberty (lit. in a wide open place)
- B. I am not ashamed

IV. I Love and Meditate on Your Word (47-48)

- A. I shall delight in Your commandments,
Which I love
- B. I shall lift up my hands to Your commandments
Which I love
- C. And I will meditate on Your statutes

Exposition of Psalm 119
Zayin (z) Stanza (49-56)
God's Remembering and Ours

I. God's remembering (49-50)

A. Remember Your Word

B. Comfort in Affliction (50)

II. I have remembered Your ordinances (51-53)

A. The derision of the arrogant (51)

B. The comfort of remembering (52)

C. The anger over apostasy (53)

III. I remember Your name (54-56)

A. Singing Your Word (54)

B. Remembering Your name (55)

C. Rekindled commitment (56)

Variety of translations

^{ESV} **Psalm 119:56** This blessing has fallen to me, that I have kept your precepts.

^{NIV} **Psalm 119:56** This has been my practice: I obey your precepts.

^{NJB} **Psalm 119:56** This is what it means to me, observing your precepts.

Literally, This has become for me.

“It is not surprising, therefore, that such contemplations of the Person of the Word would consequently lead to a rekindled commitment to the precepts of the Word” (Zemek, 164).

Conclusion

Exposition of Psalm 119
Heth (x) Stanza (57-64)
The Exile's Inheritance

I. The Lord is My Portion (57a)

- A. Portion/inheritance in the OT

- B. The eyes of faith and the inheritance
Psa. 16:5
Psa. 73:25-26
Lam 3:24

II. Obedience, Grace and More Grace (57b-58)

- A. I have said I would keep Your words

- B. I have sought Your face with all my heart
Zech. 8:21-22

- C. Give me grace according to Your Word
 - 1. Show me favor, be gracious
(Cf. 132) Ex. 33:19

 - 2. According to Your Word (utterance)
Num 6:25; Isa 30:18-19

III. Confession, Repentance and Obedience (59-60)

- A. I considered my ways

- B. And turned my feet to Your testimonies

He determined to make the word of God his rule, and to walk by that rule. He turned from the by-paths to which he had turned aside, and returned to God's testimonies. He turned not only his eye to them, but his feet, his affections to the love of God's word and his conversation to the practice of it (MH)

- C. I hastened and did not delay

When we are under convictions of sin we must strike while the iron is hot, and not think to defer the prosecution of them (MH)

IV. Rejoicing while Persecuted (61-62)

- A. The cords of the wicked

- B. I have not neglected Your Torah

- C. Rising at midnight to give thanks

V. Godly Companions (63)

- A. I am a companion of all those who fear You
And those who keep Your precepts
Psa 1; 1 Cor. 15:33
Prov. 28:24

- B. Daniel's friendships

VI. The Lord's Hesed fills the earth (64)

Bookends – Inheritance and *hesed*

- A. God's lovingkindness is better than life
Psa. 63:3

- B. Once again, teach me Your torah!

“Out of the fullness of the loving-kindness of God, which is nowhere unattested upon the earth, he implores for himself the inward teaching concerning His Word as the highest and most cherished mercies” (Delitzsch, 251).

Exposition of Psalm 119
Teth (j) Stanza (65-72)
God is Good and Does Good

I. God's Goodness in the School of Affliction (65-67)

- A. God's goodness in restoring his child (65)

- B. Prayer to learn good discernment and knowledge (66)

- C. Confession of the benefits of God's discipline (67)

II. God's Goodness in His Person and Actions (68-70)

- A. God is good and does good (68)

- B. The heart of the arrogant and the humbled (69-70)
An ABA'B' chiasm –
 - 1. The arrogant

 - 2. The Psalmist (humbled)

III. Reflections on God's Goodness in Affliction (71-72)

- A. A benefit of God's goodness in affliction (71)

- B. Another benefit of God's goodness in affliction (72)

Conclusion

1. The Psalmist is reflective. His mood is retrospective.
2. His focus is not merely on his afflictions, but what God taught him in his afflictions.
3. This stanza points to the NT teaching of Rom. 5:3-5; Jas. 1:2-4; Heb. 12:5-11.

“Our good and gracious God skillfully but lovingly employs affliction and adversity, pressure and pain, trials and tribulations, as crucial instruments in His process of maturing those who belong to Him” (Zemek, 182).
4. Can we say this about our own afflictions?