

Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

For reply: Email: truthfortoday@aol.com

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Speaker: Mr. George Stevens

Psalm 119 - The importance of God's Word: Cheth - Psalm 119:57-64

Psalm 119 is one of a dozen or so alphabetic poems in the Bible. It has 176 verses that are divided into 22 stanzas. Each stanza begins with each of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Each stanza contains eight verses. The number eight is significant to the section that we have today, because Cheth is also the eighth letter of the alphabet. This number denotes a "new beginning" or "resurrection" in the Scriptures. For example, Noah, who stepped out onto a regenerated earth is called the eighth (a better translation is one of eight, Noah was the tenth from Adam) person in 2 Peter 2:5 and, of the earth's population at the time, only eight souls were saved. Furthermore, we can find eight resurrections of specific individuals in the scriptures other than that of Christ Himself. In fact, if we look at the mathematical total of the numbers represented by the Greek letters that spell "Jesus", we find 888. He is the Resurrection and the Life. There is no one to compare with Him relative to new beginnings.

It is also worthy of note that the "number 22" in that 22 letters form the Hebrew alphabet. Hence, the emphasis of the Psalm relates to the word of God. The latter not only furnishes us with a knowledge of the living God; but speaks of the Christ who has revealed Him. Jesus is, in the Greek, the Alpha and Omega (see Revelation 1:8, Revelation 1:11, Revelation 21:6 and Revelation 22:13). The A-Z of God. In Hebrew the equivalent would be the Aleph and Tau.

Let's take a closer look at the letter that marks today's stanza, namely, "Cheth." It means a "portion" or "share", hence, the literal translation: "My portion."

In Psalm 16:5-6 we read words of David written in the spirit of Christ. He states: *"The LORD is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot. The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage."*

Psalm 16:5-6 show that the word "portion" parallels the idea of an inheritance. This is supported by Deuteronomy 10:9 where we find: *"Wherefore Levi hath no part nor inheritance with his brethren; the LORD is his inheritance, according as the LORD thy God promised him."* Psalm 142:5 also strengthens the thought: *"I cried unto thee, O LORD: I said, Thou art my refuge and my portion in the land of the living."*

But what is the force of saying, *"The LORD is my portion"*? On the one hand, it tells us that the psalmist placed the LORD above everything else. In 1 Samuel 2:2 we find Hannah stating in her prayer, *"There is none holy as the LORD: for there is none beside thee: neither is there any rock like our God."* David could also say, *"Among the gods there is none like unto thee, O Lord; neither are there any works like unto thy works"* (Psalm 86:8). Jeremiah also knew this truth, *"Forasmuch as there is none like unto thee, O LORD; thou art great, and thy name is great in might"* (Jeremiah 10:6). Our God is almighty, immortal, all-knowing, unchanging, ever-present, light, life and love. He is ever faithful and ever true. Every resource in heaven and earth are at His disposal. What a realisation this is, *"The LORD is my portion!"* In the words of the Apostle Paul, *"If God be for us, who can be against us?"* (see Romans 8:31).

On the other hand, the wonder of His Person demands our submission to His will and purposes. Remember Abram! In Genesis 12 we find the LORD said to him, *"Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee..."* (Genesis 12:1). This meant a huge upheaval for Abram, but in faith he trusted and obeyed. In like manner, the psalmist is committed to keep the words of the LORD (Psalm 119:57). Why? Not only because of the greatness of God's person, but because the psalmist loved Him. In John 14:23 we find the Lord Jesus saying, *"If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him."* It is well said that the measure of love for God is obedience. The "words" mentioned in John 14:23 encompass all that the Saviour said. They include both His sayings and His commandments. It is sometimes said that:

- To keep the commands of Jesus is the duty of love;
- To keep His sayings is the life of love; and
- To keep His words is the joy of love;

Of course, the word of the Lord is tempered with light and love. It always seeks the best for His children. We could say that by obeying His word, we are dwelling in His love.

Next, the writer makes a strong statement in Psalm 119:58 *"I intreated thy favour with my whole heart..."* The word *"intreated"* has the force of "rubbing" or "wearing out". We could say that the psalmist had worn out the favour of God with persistent prayer from a sincere and affectionate heart. He knew the overflowing grace of His God and tapped into it with his supplications.

In Luke 18:2-8, we find an example of this attitude for prayer. There, the Lord Jesus spoke of a widow who pursued her case against an adversary with an unbelieving judge. The latter would not take up her case; but the widow persisted with her plea. Finally, the judge gave in saying within himself, *"Though I fear not God, nor regard man; yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me"* (Luke 18:4-5). That's the sort of prayer in which the author of Psalm 119 engaged and how much faster the LORD would have responded!

The psalmist follows this with an immediate request, namely, *"Be merciful unto me according to Thy word"* (Psalm 119:58). The Hebrew meaning of the word for "merciful" has the force of one stooping in kindness to an inferior. In Psalm 51:1 David makes a similar request, *"Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions."* David had sinned grievously (see 2 Samuel 11:1-12:15 and was seeking the same mercy from God in order to be forgiven. There the king reminds God of the kindness of His nature and the abundance of His compassion. In Psalm 119, the psalmist reminds God that His word says that He is kind and, therefore, to uphold the truth of His word, He must act accordingly. This praying saint uses God's own word as a lever to move His arm in mercy.

The psalmist then wrote, *"I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies"* (Psalm 119:59). He had considered his ways (Psalm 119:59a) and, without doubt, the motives that moved him. He decided which were right and which were wrong. He thought of the consequences that resulted from them. He wondered which of them brought glory to God. An example of this kind of thinking is found in Haggai 1:5-6 where the LORD asks the people of Judah to consider their ways. He said, *"Consider your ways. Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes."* Their sinful ways had made any blessing void.

In contrast, we find in Psalm 128:1-2, *"Blessed is every one that feareth the LORD; that walketh in his ways. For thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands: happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee."*

You may ask, what are His ways like? Psalm 145:17 has the answer - they are righteous. The first part of Proverbs 11:5 shows that our righteousness will direct our way. Of course, as we saw in a previous broadcast, the cleansing of our way is the result of obedience to God's word (see Psalm 119:9). Hence, we have the next part of the psalmist's sentence stating: *"And turned my feet unto thy testimonies"* (Psalm 119:59).

Testimonies are the proven truths concerning the attributes, ways and works of God, especially those presented in the Law of Moses. The Psalmist turned away from his old ways to walk in complete obedience to the will of God as found in the Scriptures. This would have included repentance which is a change of mind that, over time, results in a pure heart.

Next, we read, *"I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments"* (Psalm 119:60). The word used for "haste" means to be "eager with excitement or joy". This is emphasised by the clause, *"I delayed not..."* which shows the immediate response of the psalmist to keep the commandments of the LORD. There was no questioning or reluctance at all. This was the attitude of the Lord Jesus Christ as the Perfect Servant on earth. He was "obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (see Philippians 2:8). Hebrews 10:7 records His words, *"Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God."*

We have a saying, "Procrastination is the thief of time!" Every hour we lose in not obeying the Lord reduces our investment in Glory where the treasures of our faith are being stored. Will we receive a commendation for faithfulness from the Lord when we arrive in the harbour of heaven or will we drift to our destination in a state of shipwreck? The procrastinating servant is characterised by the following verses:

*"To-morrow," he said to his spirit,
"Tomorrow, the Lord I'll believe.
Tomorrow, I'll pray as I ought to
Tomorrow, to God, I will cleave.
Tomorrow, I'll walk by His Spirit
And for Him good fruit I shall bear.
Tomorrow, I'll worship and witness
And show to all others I care."*

*"Tomorrow, I'll serve with rejoicing,
Working by night and by day."
"Tomorrow!" he said with conviction,
"The Lord God shall show me His way.
Tomorrow, my zeal shall be witnessed.
Tomorrow, I'll set time aside.
Tomorrow, my all, I shall give Him.
Know that He stays by my side."*

*The marching of time was relentless;
"Tomorrow" had nothing to gain;
For, as life's short journey was ending,
His body was weakened by pain.
Tomorrow had never delivered
An item of joy for the Lord.
No treasure was stored in the heavens
And lost was the Saviour's reward.*

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In the words of Ephesians 5:15-16, the Apostle Paul exhorts: *"See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil."* There is a great deal of glitter in this world which seeks to captivate our hearts; but the word of the Lord tells us to buy back the time so that we may faithfully and earnestly serve God.

Returning to our psalm, we read: *"The bands of the wicked have robbed me: but I have not forgotten thy law"* (Psalm 119:61). This sentence shows us that the psalmist had enemies who had bound him with cords. As Young's Literal Translation puts it: *"Cords of the wicked have surrounded me..."* This suggests that even when held as a prisoner, he had not forgotten the law of God. His body may have been bound, but his faith was free. The Apostle Paul is a good example of this. Though chained to guards in prison, he was still allowed to write. The result was what are called "Prison Epistles" which included: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon.

We have three enemies who seek to bind us. They are: the World, the Flesh and the Devil. 1 John 2:15-17 states: *"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever."* The world is that system of things formed by thought and activity that opposes the will of God. It is by the power of the cross alone that the world is crucified to the believer, and the believer to the world (see Galatians 6:14).

The flesh is that sinful nature, inherent in natural man, which constantly seeks self-exaltation, self-gratification and self-satisfaction. The Christian is to flee from the strong desires of this self-centred nature. He is to recognise that his old nature has been crucified with Christ. We read in Galatians 2:20, *"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me"* (see also Galatians 5:24). The Christian should live by the righteous nature that God gave to him when he first believed.

The devil seeks to destroy faith in God. The world is but one of the tools he uses to do this. He is both the god and prince of this world (2 Corinthians 4:4; John 12:31). A Christian is to resist him and to avoid the snares he sets for him (James 4:7).

Psalm 119:62 states: *"At midnight I will rise to give thanks unto thee because of thy righteous judgments."* Here is a remarkable act of devotion. The psalmist purposely rose from bed at midnight in order to praise and worship the LORD. At night, when we pray beside our beds, tiredness often spoils our concentration and, at times, we find it difficult to stay awake. The LORD'S judgments, which are both true and just (Psalm 19:9), brought so much respect and joy to the psalmist following his meditations that he was prepared to diligently praise the Lord in the middle of the night. In Acts 16:25 we read of the Apostle Paul and Silas (in prison) praying and singing praises to God even though they had suffered physical abuse previously.

In Psalm 119:63 we then read: *"I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts."* We have a proverb that says, "Birds of a feather flock together." This means that people of like mind, tastes and interests will be found together. So, anyone who has trusted in God will ensure that he meets with fellow believers. In 2 Timothy 2:22 we read: *"...follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure*

heart.” Today, faithful Christians meet and serve the Lord together. They prefer the prayer meeting to the pub and the Bible reading to the dance. They regularly speak of God and spiritual things one to the other (Malachi 3:16).

The final sentence under today's consideration states: *“The earth, O LORD, is full of thy mercy: teach me thy statutes”* (Psalm 119:64). The word for “mercy” is “kindness”. It covers the fact that God doesn't judge us in the way we deserve. His kindness seeks to bless us. This kindness defends us, provides for us, encourages us, assures us, comforts us and heals us. As the prophet Jeremiah has said: *“It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness”* (Lamentations 3:22-23). It is no accident that the following words of this scripture take us back to where we started. He writes: *“The LORD is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him”* (Lamentations 3:24).

We summarise this meditation with a poem:

*You are my portion, gracious Lord,
The portion that I chose.
I am resolved your word to keep
For it your person shows.*

*Your face, I seek with all my heart
For with your grace it gleams.
According to your precious word
Your mercy to me beams.*

*My life was foolish and perverse!
Dark sin had filled my days;
But testimonies wise and true
Turned me from wicked ways.*

*Most hastily Your laws I'll keep;
My heart with You I'll share.
I shall not dwell in slothfulness;
But Your reproach shall bear.*

*Though cords of wicked men restrain
The body that I wear.
My faith shall be at liberty;
To Your precepts repair.*

*At midnight, I shall bless Your name
For judgments just and true.
I'll gather with the faithful, Lord,
All those who trust in You.*

*O Lord, Your mercy e'er endures;
It fully fills the earth.
Oh, teach me all I need to know
As I explore Your worth.*

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