

Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

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Psalm 119 - The importance of God's Word: Teth - Psalm 119:65-72

Today we come to the ninth talk as we make our way through Psalm 119. As you will know by now (if you have been listening), Psalm 119 is conveniently arranged into 22 sections of eight verses, with each section headed by a letter of the Hebrew alphabet. This is not the work of the translators (as are chapters and verses); the psalm was written like this. Unfortunately in the translation from Hebrew to English, we lose the sense of the way the psalm was composed. It is called an acrostic psalm and our section today is headed by the ninth letter in the Hebrew alphabet - Teth. Each of the eight verses in the section we shall consider all begin with the letter - Teth, (although we don't see this in our English translations).

It has been suggested that this psalm, the longest in the book of Psalms, was written in this way to help the people memorize it. That could well be. It would certainly make sense. When I was a boy in Sunday school, I remember singing:

*S for sin, a dreadful thing,
A for Adam who first fell,
V for victory Jesus brings,
I the one He came to tell,
Open up your heart to Him,
U can know His peace within,
R the remedy for sin
That will bring us back to Jesus.*

I'm sure many listeners will also remember singing this chorus, in earlier days, and thinking of the Saviour and the salvation which is to be found in Him alone!

Whilst we do not know who wrote the psalm, we can be sure that he was a lover of God's Word. It is not known how much of the Scriptures the psalmist had. Perhaps it was just the books of Moses, but he delighted in it nonetheless! God is mentioned in all 176 verses, and only in three verses is the Word of God not referenced. The unmistakable theme of Psalm 119 is the Word of God.

It is worth noticing that there are many different Hebrew words used for God's Word in this psalm. We get all these different Hebrew words in the Psalm 119:1-11, and I will list them in the order which they appear.

In Psalm 119:1 we find "*the law of the LORD*", and the word "law" has the thought of teaching or instruction. This word is used in Psalm 119:70 and Psalm 119:72 of the section we will consider today.

In Psalm 119:2 we read of "*His testimonies*", meaning a testimony, or a reiteration, an attestation or witness. This word is not found in our section.

In Psalm 119:3 we have "*His ways*", meaning a path which one takes, a mode of life, a course of action marked out by God's Law. Again this word is not found in our section.

In Psalm 119:4 we find "*Thy precepts*", meaning a charge given to us by God for which we are responsible. This word is used in Psalm 119:69.

In Psalm 119:5 we have "*Thy statutes*", which has the thought of a mark carved or engraved, a definite limit set, an appointed law to stimulate obedience. This word is used in Psalm 119:68 and Psalm 119:71.

In Psalm 119:6 we find "*Thy commandments*", having the idea of both command and prohibition. It shows us the requirement of God's will. This word is used in Psalm 119:66.

In Psalm 119:7 we read of "*Thy judgments*", and the thought is a sentence of a judge. This word is not found in our section.

In Psalm 119:9 we get the first reference to *"Thy word."* It has a similar meaning to the Greek word *"logos"* and it means the articulation of God's will to men. Just as Peter speaks of *"the oracles of God"* (1 Peter 4:11). This word is used in Psalm 119:65.

Psalm 119:11 *"Thy saying"*, translated "word" but with the meaning of "a saying". It could be a poetic word or speech, or sacred hymn but communicated orally. This word is used in Psalm 119:67.

In the section we will consider today, Psalm 119:65-72, Teth, we find six of these nine words used by the psalmist. Let us read the verses together: *"Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O LORD, according unto thy word. Teach me good judgment and knowledge: for I have believed thy commandments. Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word. Thou art good, and doest good; teach me thy statutes. The proud have forged a lie against me: but I will keep thy precepts with my whole heart. Their heart is as fat as grease; but I delight in thy law. It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes. The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver"* (Psalm 119:65-72).

As are most of the sections in this psalm, these words, which we have read, are personal to the psalmist. He is speaking to his God, the One whom he has learned to trust, even in adversity. Perhaps this is something we can relate to? Maybe we feel that God has passed us, or is passing us, through adversity. These are personal matters, between us, individually, and our Lord. Perhaps we know little or nothing about adversity, for the moment, but which of us knows what lies before us in this life? So, in many ways, this section of Psalm 119, Psalm 119:65-72 is a sobering one.

Let us now go through Psalm 119:65-72, verse by verse.

Psalm 119:65, *"Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O LORD, according unto thy word."* In this statement, I believe the psalmist was happily acknowledging God's goodness in His dealings with mankind. We said earlier that the word the psalmist uses in this verse has a similar meaning to the Greek word *"logos"* and it means the articulation of God's will to men. I notice that it is the same word which he uses in Psalm 119:89 where he states, *"For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven."* The psalmist is thinking of the greatness of God, and bows down before Him as His servant. Many a master would deal unkindly and perhaps even cruelly with his servant, but not the LORD. David could say, *"The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy"* (see Psalm 103:8). If we have come to know the Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour and Lord, then we have special cause to thank God for His goodness. The Apostle Paul tells us that it is *"the goodness of God which leads men to repentance"* (see Romans 2:4). It is certainly true that, if we have a deep sense in our souls of the goodness of God, it will help us face the trials of life and any adversity which comes our way.

Psalm 119:66, *"Teach me good judgment and knowledge: for I have believed thy commandments."* Not for the first time the psalmist prays, *"Teach me."* And he repeats this prayer in Psalm 119:68. I think I count 10 times when he prays, *"Teach me"*, in this psalm (see Psalm 119:12, 26, 33, 64, 66, 68, 99, 108, 124, 135). When I was younger I had a desire to learn the accordion. My father found someone who was willing to teach me, but alas, I think I was unteachable! My teacher was a good player and put time and effort into teaching me, but I didn't do the work. I wanted to play football with my friends rather than practise my music. I wonder, are we teachable in the things of God, in His will for our lives? The people of God in the Old Testament had the Law of Moses, and we mentioned previously that the reference to *"Thy commandments"* (Psalm 119:66), had the thought of both commands and prohibitions. But in the perfect life of the Lord Jesus Christ, lived in this world, as recorded in the Gospels, and in the apostles doctrine, as taught in the epistles, we see fully the requirements of God's will for us. The question is, are we willing and prepared to be taught? You will notice that the psalmist prays for *"good judgment and knowledge."* (Psalm 119:66). Wisdom and knowledge are not necessarily the same. Knowledge is important, we need it, but wisdom lets us know how to act with that knowledge. It has been well said, "Knowledge is knowing that a tomato is a fruit; wisdom is not putting it in a fruit salad." You will remember that, in succeeding king David, Solomon asked God for wisdom (see 1 Kings 3). In our modern day there seem to be limitless sources of knowledge, but at the same time a lack of wisdom shown by many. Of course, I am speaking of godly wisdom, and not the wisdom of men, which Paul dismisses as foolishness, as he writes to the Christians in Corinth (see 1 Corinthians 1:18-25). We need to prayerfully seek the wisdom of God. James in his epistle says, *"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him"* (see James 1:5).

Psalm 119:67, *"Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word."* We have no idea what sorrowful experience the psalmist had passed through, but it would appear that he recognised that this experience was for his ultimate good. I know it is becoming less accepted in our society today, but discipline is an act of love. The Bible teaches this. We read in the book of Proverbs, *"My son, despise not the chastening of the LORD; neither be weary of his correction: for whom the LORD loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth"* (Proverbs 3:11-12). The writer to the Hebrews quotes these words and adds, *"Now no chastening for the present"*

seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby" (see Hebrews 12:11). However, I don't want to give the impression that any or every trial we pass through is necessarily God's chastisement upon us for our waywardness. I guess that is where Job's comforters (so called) went wrong, in their assumption that Job must have sinned to be in the situation he was in. But it does us good to remember that our Father's hand is always upon us, for blessing and good, even if it takes His chastening to bring it about in our lives. We noticed that the word used for *"thy word"* in Psalm 119:67 has the meaning of "a saying". It does appear that the psalmist recognised that he had been disobedient in relation to God's sayings, His word.

Psalm 119:68, *"Thou art good, and doest good; teach me thy statutes."* Again the psalmist returns to the theme of God's goodness, and prays to be taught. God is good, and He does good! When God answers our prayers, and heals us or helps us in some way, we readily say, "God is good." But the challenge for us is to recognise that even when things don't work out as we had hoped and prayed, God is still good! I remember speaking with a young man after he had just sang a solo at the funeral service of his stepmother. I said how remarkable I thought it was that he could sing this hymn of praise on such an occasion. His reply was, "We praise God on the good days, and we praise Him on the bad days too." He is right, of course, and what a challenge that is! Perhaps with the Apostle Paul we can say, *"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God..."* (see Romans 8:28). Remember, too, the words of Job, *"The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD"* (see Job 1:21). Job didn't only recognise the hand of God in his difficult circumstances, he acknowledged His providence with him, and he blessed the name of the LORD. What a man of faith he was!

"Teach me thy statutes" (Psalm 119:68). We noted that the word used for *"thy statutes"*, has the thought of a mark carved or engraved, a definite limit set. In New Testament language, the psalmist wanted to keep himself in the love of God. He wanted to be approved of God, by being obedient to His word.

Psalm 119:69, *"The proud have forged a lie against me: but I will keep thy precepts with my whole heart."* Pride is a dreadful thing, and is even spoken of by non-Christians in a negative way. If we are true followers of the Lord Jesus, let us seek to be humble, following in His steps (see 1 Peter 2:21). From Psalm 119:51, we know that these proud people had derided the psalmist. They had mocked him mercilessly, although we are not told the reason why. We read that they forged a lie against him. To me, the idea of forging is one of effort and requires work. So I suggest that these people had worked hard to make this lie against him. You will remember Daniel, and how those who sought to bring him down could not find fault in him (Daniel 6:1-4). So they had to forge, to manufacture, a situation where his praying to his God was against the king's commandment (Daniel 6:5-23). Not too long afterwards, they met with a terrible end (Daniel 6:24), as will all who are proud and liars, if they do not repent. We may experience this too, lies being told against us, and men mocking us. Remember what the Lord Jesus told His disciples, as He prepared them for His departure out of this world, He said, *"If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you"* (see John 15:18). I guess the trouble is that sometimes the things people say about us, mocking us, may well be true. How we need to remember God's precepts. We noted that the word used for *"thy precepts"* (Psalm 119:69) had the thought of a charge given to us by God for which we are responsible. Peter's words are surely worth noting, *"But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf"* (see 1 Peter 4:15-16).

Psalm 119:70, *"Their heart is as fat as grease; but I delight in thy law."* This verse is of course linked with the previous one and is the psalmist's view of those proud and lying persons. I don't know what you make of the statement, *"Their heart is as fat as grease"*, but it certainly is not a complimentary one! I'm sure this is not a reference to their physical appearance but rather of their spiritual condition. (I say spiritual as man is a spiritual being, not that these people have spiritual life). As far as I know, this is the only time this word translated "fat" is used in the Scriptures, so we are unable to compare Scripture with Scripture. However, sometimes the thought of fatness in the Scriptures is a very positive thing. Recently a brother in Christ wrote to me, thanking me for doing a service for him, and in his note he quoted, *"the soul of the diligent shall be made fat"* (see Proverbs 13:4). I was slightly bemused, but I took it as a compliment. But as we've already said, there was nothing complimentary about the words the psalmist writes about these people.

In contrast to these proud and spiritually lifeless people, the psalmist could say that he delighted in the law of the LORD. We mentioned earlier that the force of the word used for *"the law of the LORD"* has the thought of teaching or instruction. It is good if we have the energy of heart to be able to be taught and instructed in the Word of God.

Psalm 119:71, *"It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes."* We saw in Psalm 119:67 that the psalmist recognised that the affliction which had come upon him was for his good, because it resulted in his keeping the word of the LORD. Perhaps he didn't appreciate this at the time, but looking back over the years he had come to see the value in the trials he had passed through. Perhaps you know the poem:

*Not until the loom is silent,
And the shuttles cease to fly,
Will God unroll the pattern
And explain the reason why.*

*The dark threads are as needful
In the weaver's skillful hand,
As the threads of gold and silver
For the pattern which He planned.*

Anon

We have noted that the word used for "thy statutes" has the thought of a mark carved or engraved as a definite limit set. The psalmist had learned these boundaries through the experience of affliction. It may be that we are passed through difficult experiences so that we also may learn lessons in the school of God.

Psalm 119:72, *"The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver."* Often men misquote the Scripture and say, "Money is the root of all evil", but the Apostle Paul did not say that! He said, **"The love of money is a root of all evil"** (see 1 Timothy 6:10). Today we hear people speaking of millions, billions and even trillions, but in Old Testament times, thousands was the biggest number in common use. Here in the last verse of this section, Psalm 119:72, the psalmist is saying in effect, that the teaching and instruction of the LORD, is better than millions, billions or even trillions of gold and silver. The word "better" is only found once in this psalm (Psalm 119:72), although the word "well" in Psalm 119:65, and "good" in Psalm 119:68 and Psalm 119:71 have the same root. I think we only find the word "better" used seven times in all of the psalms (see Psalm 37:16; Psalm 63:3; Psalm 69:31; Psalm 84:10; Psalm 118:8-9; Psalm 119:72). Search them out and see what the better things are. I trust these few comments have been helpful to you as we continue our study in Psalm 119.

May God bless you all.

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