

July 7, 2021 | Wednesday Night Live | Psalm 119: Learning the Letters of Scripture

Week 8 | Psalm 119:49-56 | Zayin

Today, we move on to the seventh letter of the Hebrew alphabet, Zayin. <Insert Picture>

This stanza is all about reflection. Three times throughout these eight verses, the Psalmist speaks about "remembering" or "thinking" on something (cf. vs. 49, 52, 55). In Hebrew, the word for recollect is *zākār*, a fitting term for a stanza devoted to the letter Zayin.¹ Memorials and remembrances are essential for us because we have a tendency to forget. This is particularly helpful when it comes to a vow. To deliberate over something that is promised keeps that promise alive in our psyche. The Psalmist will not allow himself to forget. As often as he needs to, he will awaken old memories and breathe new life into them. Because he knows that to forget the past means repeating past mistakes and missing out on the blessings in the future.

READ: Psalm 119:49-56 (ESV)

Zayin

⁴⁹ Remember your word to your servant, in which you have made me hope.

⁵⁰ This is my comfort in my affliction, that your promise gives me life.

⁵¹ The insolent utterly deride me, but I do not turn away from your law.

⁵² When I think of your rules from of old, I take comfort, O Lord.

⁵³ Hot indignation seizes me because of the wicked, who forsake your law.

⁵⁴ Your statutes have been my songs in the house of my sojourning.

⁵⁵ I remember your name in the night, O Lord, and keep your law.

⁵⁶ This blessing has fallen to me, that I have kept your precepts.

The last synonym I'd like to focus on for Scripture is the word "precepts." "Precepts" (*piqqûdîm*) occurs twenty-one times in Psalm 119, twenty-four times in total, and it only appears in the book of Psalms, though its derivatives are to be found elsewhere.²

¹ Wilcock, Michael, *The Message of Psalms 73-150*, The Bible Speaks Today, (Downers Grove, Ill; InterVarsity Press Academic, 2001), p. 200.

² Longman, Tremper, III, & David E. Garland, *Psalms*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Revised Edition, Volume 5, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2008), p. 859.

What does the term “precepts” mean?

"Precepts" is a term used in the context of an overseer or supervisor.³ The word has to deal with nuance and detail.⁴ For instance, when a cognate of the word is used in Jeremiah 23:2, God says he will 'attend to' (*ṣāgēd*) the shepherds who have not 'attended to' their flock.⁵ There were certain things the shepherds—i.e., the leaders of Israel—were supposed to be doing, but they failed in their duty. They were supposed to gather the children of Israel in solidarity toward God; instead, these “shepherds” scattered God’s sheep. They knew the “precepts” of God. They knew how they were supposed to lead. But they simply just chose not to. And so, they would be held accountable by God for their lack of performance. There are checks and balances in every healthy system to help it stay above board and keep it on track. Precepts are those guidelines and guardrails that keep things in order and accountable. How else can one lead a good life if they’re not given specific instructions on how to do so? Precepts help iron out the details and the practical how-tos.

What are the principles the Psalmist is trying to instill in this seventh stanza?

Vs. 49 Here, the Psalmist is reminding ("remember") God about His own promises ("word"). He knows that God is a "man" of his word, and so he reminds the Lord that some pledge has yet to be fulfilled. Hence, our writer isn't so much as asking God to remember as he's asking God to act.⁶ Again, we're not told what this promise is, only that he has been made to "hope" in its fulfillment. This is interesting because often, a writer in the Scripture waits ***for*** a word from the Lord. Here, the Psalmist is quite literally waiting “in” the promise. The destination has already been given, but it has not been reached. His hope is dependent on the word of the Lord. It has taken a heart laden down by heavy burdens and lifted it up on the higher ground.

Vs. 50 Our writer needs "comfort" while being "afflicted." Where does he turn? To his family? No. To his friends? No. To himself? Absolutely not. He turns to God's "promises," which have given him "life." Consolation for a weary life is to be found within the pages of Scripture. While it can, at times, bring

³ Kidner, Derek, *Psalm 73-150*, The Kidner Classic Commentaries, (Downers Grove, ILL: Inter-Varsity Press Academic, Reprint, 2008), p. 454.

⁴ Wilcock (2001), p. 203.

⁵ Kidner (2008), p. 454.

⁶ Allen, Leslie C., *Psalm 101-150*, The World Biblical Commentary, Volume 21, (Nashville, TN; Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2002), p. 188.

conviction, that conviction is never fatalistic. It does not burden the heart so much that it cannot breathe. Instead, God's promises are transformative and alleviating. It takes the dead and makes them alive once again (cf. Rom. 5:12-17).

- Vs. 51 The "insolent" is willful and self-absorbed in their own thoughts and ideas. They call the shots in their own life, and they cannot understand why anyone would choose to follow what God says. So, they "deride" the follower. To allow Jehovah to decide for them is stupid. But adversity, if met head-on, reproduces durability. Thus, even though the Psalmist is disparaged for his faith, he does not "turn away" from God's "law." After all, as he has just pointed out in the previous verse, they are life to him. Sadly, this is not the case for all who follow God. When push comes to shove, many will choose the path of least resistance, a way where they are not mocked for their faith. It is a shame, really. Far better to be ridiculed now than to be disowned later (cf. Mat. 10:33). What is a little humiliation when compared to the hallelujahs in the life to come?
- Vs. 52 Things become more and more stable the longer they exist. God's "rules" pre-date the universe itself. They are unchanging and uncompromising. The "old" guidelines may appear to have faded in the public arena, but they are still there, just below the surface. Though they have been tested and tried, they have not been shaken or moved. Like an old familiar landmark, God's standards give "comfort" to weary travelers reassuring them that they are headed in the right direction.
- Vs. 53 Often, we get angry for the wrong reasons (cf. Eph. 4:26). One surefire way to know if our anger is justified is to ask ourselves, "Would God be angry at this too?" This is the Psalmist's approach. Red "hot indignation" has seized his heart because the wicked around him have "forsaken" God's "law." The word used here for "hot indignation" refers to a forest fire that consumes acres upon acres of land (Ps. 11:6; Lam. 5:10).⁷ Meaning his rage is fully ablaze in the face of such disobedience. But why get so angry? Because, when a people devolve into anarchy and lawlessness, all people suffer.

⁷ Goldingay, John, *Psalms*, Volume 3: Psalms 90-150, The Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 3:403; Longman (2008), p. 869.

Sinfulness has an expansive effect. It not only hurts the one who sins, but it hurts those around that person as well (cf. Rom. 8:19-23).

- Vs. 54 Amid the mayhem around him, the Psalmist's voice rises above the cacophony of a sinful world, singing "songs" inspired by the "statues" of God. As a "sojourner," the Psalmist has no absolute security and no actual rights. Though he is in a not-too-distant land, the inhabitants of that land play unfamiliar music, and their harmonies are discordant. So, feeling like he doesn't belong, this pilgrim finds comfort in whistling the melodies of his heavenly country. He is not home, but he can, at least, bring a little of his home to wherever he's at. Should our singer/songwriter ever feel discouraged, he need only hum one of those old tunes to encourage his heart. And should he belt out those tried-and-true choruses, he'll find that the pressure from within gradually begins to dissipate. Music is the balm of the soul, after all (cf. 1 Sam. 16:14-23). This is especially the case when harmonies and lyrics are taken straight from the pages of Scripture.
- Vs. 55 The name of God is a powerful deterrent when confronting the enemy. Like a heavily fortified citadel, God's name is a safe and secure place for his followers to run into. The Psalmist knows this. He has no other defense but the Lord. And it is especially hazardous for him as it is "in the night;" a time when it is hardest to see approaching enemies.⁸ Thus, he actively "remembers" the name of the Lord as a way to sure up and strengthen his mind. He cannot see, so he looks to the past for comfort. And what a relief that name is. After all, it was in that hallowed name that an old man was made the father of a nation (cf. Gen. 12:1-9). What's more, by the power of that sacred name, the Israelites were set free (cf. Ex. 3:14). And, ultimately, at the end of all time, every knee will bow in reverence to that great name (cf. Phil. 2:10-11). Even demons tremble in fear at the utterance of His name (cf. Ja. 2:19). There truly is no other name like the name of God. Anywho forget that do so at their own peril.
- Vs. 56 What a "blessing" it is to know and "keep" God's "precepts." The Psalmist would not know how to live if it weren't for God's governing guidelines showing him the way. And, instead of them being something to discover on his own, they have actually "fallen" right into the Psalmist's lap. And

despite the difficulties he faces daily, those checks and balances have provided him a good life.

"What's your takeaway?"

My takeaway this evening is this: there is an ocean's worth of power in the name of God. I don't say it nearly enough, and I don't claim it as oft as I should. There is power in the name of Jesus.

VIDEO DESCRIPTION

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TITLE: Zayin

TEXT: Psalm 119:49-56

Pastor's manuscript can be found here: