

Psalm 119:49-72: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 0 0] Psalm 119 verses 49 to 72 Zion Remember your word to your servant, in which you have made me hope.

This is my comfort in my affliction, that your promise gives me life. The insolent utterly deride me, but I do not turn away from your law. When I think of your rules from of old, I take comfort, O Lord.

Hot indignation seizes me because of the wicked, who forsake your law. Your statutes have been my songs in the house of my sojourning. I remember your name in the night, O Lord, and keep your law.

This blessing has fallen to me, that I have kept your precepts. Haith The Lord is my portion. I promise to keep your words.

I entreat your favour with all my heart. Be gracious to me according to your promise. When I think on my ways, I turn my feet to your testimonies. I hasten and do not delay to keep your commandments.

[1 : 0 4] Though the cords of the wicked ensnare me, I do not forget your law. At midnight I rise to praise you, because of your righteous rules. I am a companion of all who fear you, of those who keep your precepts.

The earth, O Lord, is full of your steadfast love. Teach me your statutes. Taith You have dealt well with your servant, O Lord, according to your word.

Teach me good judgment and knowledge, for I believe in your commandments. Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep your word. You are good and do good.

Teach me your statutes. The insolence smear me with lies, but with my whole heart I keep your precepts. Their heart is unfeeling like fat, but I delight in your law.

It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes. The law of your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces. Psalm 119 is an extended meditation upon the law.

[2 : 1 1] It is an acrostic psalm with 22 sections of 8 verses, each beginning with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. It expresses the wonder and the importance of the law of God, playing upon seven synonyms for the law.

The terms seem to be interchangeable, although there may be slightly varying shades of meaning. It can seem very repetitive at first glance, but it invites the person who sings it to meditate and reflect more deeply upon the law by turning its meaning and importance over again and again in his mind in various ways.

The purpose of this practice is to learn wisdom. In this psalm the hearer, reader or singer learns more fully that the law is not merely something to be obeyed, but something closely to be observed and attended to, in order that they may gain wisdom and find delight in the ways and the words of the Lord.

It is likely that this psalm would have been divided into its component parts, rather than being recited in full on every single occasion. However, its acrostic form lends itself to memorization, and invites the reader to think of it in terms of completeness, covering all of the bases from Aleph to Tau.

The seventh section begins in verse 49. The psalmist opens by asking the Lord to remember his word. The Lord's promise and word is a source of comfort and assurance for him in his affliction.

[3 : 32] Even in his situation where all seems bleak, he can take hold of what God has said, what God has promised, knowing that the Lord will surely bring it to pass. He is surrounded by people who deride him and attack him, but yet he holds fast to the law of God.

He finds comfort in these things, clinging on to them. However, when he looks around and sees the wicked, he is indignant at their forsaking of the law and of the Lord who gave it.

He is keenly aware of the glory that is due to the Lord, and feels a righteous anger when the Lord is not glorified as he ought to be. Perhaps it is through these experiences that he feels himself more keenly to be a sojourner, as he has already described himself within the psalm.

As a sojourner, the statutes or law of the Lord both arouses him to sing and serve as the content of his song. He has called for the Lord to remember him, and he remembers the name of the Lord in the night.

Indeed, he sees this keeping of the law as something that has fallen to him as a blessing, an inheritance that has been granted him by God and his goodness. In the eighth stanza, the psalmist speaks of the Lord as his portion.

[4 : 41] This is the same sort of language that is used of the Levites in Numbers chapter 18 verse 20. Here it expresses the fact that everything that the psalmist relies upon, everything that he possesses, comes from the Lord.

It is to the Lord that he looks for everything that is important to him. He reflects carefully upon his ways. Out of careful and sustained self-examination, he moves into a commitment to keep God's law, which he does not tarry in keeping.

He observes God's ways without any delay. When facing troubles, he does not lose his focus upon the law of God. When afflicted with troubles, he does not abandon the law of God, but commits himself more faithfully to it.

Waking up in the middle of the night, he praises the Lord on account of his rules. He seeks and finds community with those who are faithful to the law. Keeping good company is a common theme within the psalms, and particularly within the wisdom literature.

We can see it in Psalm 1, for instance. Keeping the company of the righteous and avoiding the company of the wicked is part of how the righteous guard their way. In the ninth stanza, he expresses the goodness of the Lord.

[5 : 50] The Lord has acted faithfully towards him. He has kept his promise. And the psalmist prays that the Lord would teach him good judgment and knowledge. He believes in God's commandment.

He believes that it is a source of goodness. And he prays that he would understand it more fully. That he would be granted the good taste to discern its inner wisdom. And that in such a manner he would grow in his spiritual life.

Such growth is also expressed in verse 67. There was a time when he went astray from the law of God. And it was through the discipline and the affliction that the Lord brought to him that now he keeps the word of God.

He knows that God is good. And God's goodness is seen in the way that he acts. He does good. For this reason he prays that the Lord would teach him his statutes. So that in keeping his statutes, he might enter into a fuller appreciation and enjoyment of God's goodness.

His valuing of the law of God is seen in the way that he values everything else. Faced with the smears and the sneers of the insolent and the ungodly, he continues to cling to the word of God and is not distracted from God's law.

[6 : 56] He delights in it. Even at the experience of the difficult discipline of the Lord, he rejoices because he has found it to be a way of learning God's law more fully. He concludes the ninth stanza by expressing its greater value to him than all these treasures and riches when in possession and in observance of God's law, he feels himself to be richer than if he were in possession of great material wealth.

A question to consider. How can the psalmist's statements in this passage help us to understand the value of God's discipline?