



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



# The Holy Book of Psalms

Psalm 119 (Part 5)

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# Introduction

- This is part 5 of Psalm 119 which includes verses 65-80
- Or, the Hebrew letters Teth and Yod
- In Teth section the verses all begin with the letter Teth
- Affliction is a central theme of this part of the Psalm, vv. 65–72
- The psalmist proclaims the benefits of adversity, and the goodness of God in afflicting him
- The psalmist sees harmony between the compassion of God and His chastisements
- The psalmist's burden was to learn something from affliction



# Introduction

- God, out of His great love to His children, turns the afflictions by the wicked, into edification of the souls of His children
- These verses reveal the source of affliction (v. 65), the purpose of affliction (vv. 66–68), and some realities of affliction (vv. 69–72)
- Then in the next section, verses 73-80, or (the Hebrew letter Yod or Jot as some write it), the psalmist is experiencing some persisting type of affliction which he attributes to the hand of God
- The psalmist is in deep sorrow, but looks to be delivered and be a blessing



# Introduction

- Facing some difficulties raise questions concerning the Justice of God
- As, where is the justice of God? ... Where is His care for His children? ... Why does God allow for His children to pass through affliction?
- The psalmist, in this part of the Psalm, presents himself, and his life, as a living answer to those questions
- He has been promised some great blessing, but he has not realized full inner blessing or outward prosperity
- Yet he “waits for God's word” and for the fulfillment of God's promises



# Introduction

## General Outline

- Teth: The Benefit of the Time of Affliction 119:65-72
- Yod: Confidence in the Creator and His Word 119:73-80

# The Benefit of the Time of Affliction 119:65-72



- This section begins with a note of gratitude
- The psalmist finds himself thankful for God's good dealing toward him, and that blessings have come *according to His word*
- Many may say that God has *dealt well* with them when they experience prosperity
- When the psalmist wrote that God had *dealt well* with him, however, he was not thinking about prosperity
- He was confessing that, even in his affliction, God had *dealt well* with him

# The Benefit of the Time of Affliction 119:65-72



- When Job was afflicted, he *“fell to the ground and worshiped. And he said: ‘Naked I came from my mother’s womb, And naked shall I return there. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; Blessed be the name of the Lord.’”* (Job 1:20)
- Job’s wife, like many prosperity-minded people, could not understand Job’s perspective
- But Job understood that prosperity and affliction came by means of God’s kind providence
- *According to Your word*, implies that the psalmist not only knew the promises of God and asked them in prayer; he also *received* the promises by faith and experienced them

# The Benefit of the Time of Affliction 119:65-72



- *Teach me good judgment and knowledge*, Again he begs for teaching, as in verse 64
- When God afflicts His people, He intends to teach them
- Since God had dealt well with him, he is encouraged to pray for judgment to appreciate the Lord's goodness
- *For I believe Your commandments*, His heart was right, and therefore he hoped his head would be made right
- He had faith, and therefore he hoped to receive wisdom
- According to the scholar Origen, He calls the virtues like humility, chastity, and self-satisfaction, as *good judgment*



# The Benefit of the Time of Affliction 119:65-72



- And he calls the mental virtues, as *knowledge*
- The scholar Origen says, “So he can have both the benefits of practical gifts (good judgments), and mental ones (knowledge)
- As according to the saying of Solomon: “*Receive my instruction, and not silver, And knowledge rather than choice gold;*” (Proverbs 8:10)
- He wanted God to *teach* him because he really did *believe* the commands and words of God
- If we really do believe His word, then we should want Him to teach us to live wisely and obediently

# The Benefit of the Time of Affliction 119:65-72



- There was a time when the psalmist was more likely to go *astray* from God's word and the wise life revealed in it
- He speaks here in verse 67 of lessons learned the hard way
- David recognizes God's action and work in his life of affliction
- *I went astray*, David could have been speaking of many times within his life
- *Before I was afflicted*, David acknowledges that it was the discipline of God that brought him back
- And it brought him back to a specific place, *keep Your word*
- That was the purpose

# The Benefit of the Time of Affliction 119:65-72



- This verse, 67, is equally applicable to Israel as a nation, taught by the discipline of exile, or to the psalmist as an individual
- Prosperity sometimes, leads to iniquity
- It makes people proud of themselves, forgetful of God, love the world, and deaf to the corrections of the word
- Affliction often becomes so necessary when one goes astray, and it so useful in reminding the person to the ways of duty and of truth
- The children of God will always benefit sooner or later by afflictions

# The Benefit of the Time of Affliction 119:65-72



- It may not be at the time of the affliction, “*Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.*” (Hebrews 12:11)
- The ultimate effect is in all cases to benefit them
- The psalmist did not become bitter or resentful toward God for the affliction that brought him to greater obedience
- But he proclaimed, *You are good*, even chastening is a proof of God’s goodness
- In fact, he even wanted more instruction from God, saying, *Teach me Your statutes*

# The Benefit of the Time of Affliction 119:65-72



- The psalmist is asking God to *Teach me Your statutes* that he may sin no more
- He pleads to be under the guidance and influence of God's word
- According to St. Dedyms the blind, the psalmist surely knows that God is "Goodness"; yet he is in need of God, Himself, to guide him, and to teach him His statutes and judgments, and to let him understand the significance of goodness
- The psalmist is not ashamed to continually seek from God to teach him

# The Benefit of the Time of Affliction 119:65-72



- The psalmist now explains the necessity of prudence
- The iniquity of *the proud* has been multiplied, proud sinners told him lies without end, to try and make him break God's law
- Therefore, prudence was necessary for him, through which *I will keep Your precepts with my whole heart*
- The lies of the proud did not distract or overly discourage the psalmist
- Instead, he dedicated himself to greater obedience and honor of God, pledging to obey Him with his *whole heart*

# The Benefit of the Time of Affliction 119:65-72



- In the Septuagint the word *as fat as grease*, is, *curdled like milk*; that is, hardened
- Those proud sinners have a heart hard as cheese formed of curdled milk, and he, therefore, dismissed them, and *delight in Your law*
- *Their heart is as fat as grease*, they may seem prospered and have health and comforts, but yet are insensible and incapable of receiving any spiritual understanding
- Their hearts were dull, insensitive, and drowning in luxury and excess, in contrast, the psalmist found *delight* in the word of God

# The Benefit of the Time of Affliction 119:65-72



- There is and always will be a clear contrast between the faithful people of God and sinners who deny Him, and that contrast is as much seen in the cares of the heart as in the actions of the life
- The psalmist repeats the idea from verse 67 for emphasis
- Affliction, brought under the wisdom and guidance of God's word, did genuine *good* in his life
- Affliction of any kind acts as a good discipline and is a school in leading the people of God to value the truth and His promises
- St. Augustine says, "he seems to me to have signified, that to know these is the same thing as to keep them, to keep them the same thing as to know them."



# The Benefit of the Time of Affliction 119:65-72



- No one but one truly meek and humble of heart, and thus truly good, and who from experience could form an opinion of what is good, could give expression to such a sentiment
- *That I may learn Your statutes*, This also shows how valuable the learning of God's word was to the psalmist
- It was entirely worth it for him to endure affliction, if only he could *learn* the *statutes* of God in the process
- This made a time of painful affliction worthwhile
- If he understands that even trouble can be good if it teaches him the word of God – if it is more valuable than his comfort – then it is more valuable than riches

# The Benefit of the Time of Affliction 119:65-72



- This great value of the word of God came from a life that had known affliction
- It was love and appreciation from the field of battle, not the palaces of ease and comfort
- David was rich and his riches increased over time, and yet he did not set his heart upon them, but upon the word of God
- *better ... Than thousands of coins of gold and silver*, because through the observance of the law we acquire life everlasting, to which no treasures can be compared
- St. John Chrysostom wonders, saying: ‘Was St. Peter the apostle poor when he had no gold or silver to give the lame man (Acts 3)?’

# Confidence in the Creator and His Word 119:73-80



- This part of the Psalm begins with the smallest Hebrew letter Jesus referred to as a “jot” in Matthew 5:18: *“Till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.”*
- In the next eight verses the psalmist gives many reasons for asking the grace to observe the law
- The first, from the fact of his being one of God’s creatures, he owes certain obligations to God because he was *fashioned* by the hands of God
- The psalmist knew that he was not the product of blind forces of nature

# Confidence in the Creator and His Word 119:73-80



- He did not evolve into the person he was, he was fashioned by the very hands of God
- The repetition of *made me, and fashioned me*, according to some, may refer to the creation of the body and the soul
- And according to others, refers to the creation of man, and his renewal in the water of baptism
- Every man is as truly the work of God's hands as the first man was
- Everyone is obligated to Him as the One who gives people life
- He, as our Creator, knows what is best for us

# Confidence in the Creator and His Word 119:73-80



- *fashioned me*, not only recognizes God as his creator but includes that it is God who is his sustainer
- Being thus entirely His, and owing Him the most profound obedience, he asks God to *Give me understanding*
- This is a plea for the ability to understand and discern the commandments of Almighty God
- It's one thing to know what is written and another thing to discern the proper application of those commandments
- He asks for and expect help in *understanding* how God created him and what his obligations are to his Maker

# Confidence in the Creator and His Word 119:73-80



- God made him, and therefore, He should not forsake and reject him and at the same time, he acknowledges the service he owes God as his Creator
- People hear the word of God through His servants, but the understanding is a gift from God
- St. Augustine says, “Let us understand ‘the hands of God’ as His power and His wisdom; both titles were given to the One Christ (1 Corinthians 1:24); which could also be understood by the expression ‘The arm of the Lord’ (Isaiah 53:1). Or let them understand ‘the hands of God’ as the Son and the Holy Spirit; on account of that the Holy Spirit works together with the Son.”

# Confidence in the Creator and His Word 119:73-80



- *Those who fear You will be glad*, They will rejoice when they see in him an example of the reward of trustful patience
- The psalmist considered that his righteous life would be an encouragement to others who also feared God
- This was another reason to hear and obey God
- They will be glad because they shall see that he has *hoped in Your word* in the promises contained in God's law
- The comforts which some of God's children have in God, and the favors they have received from Him, should be matter of joy to *Those who fear God*

# Confidence in the Creator and His Word 119:73-80



- A sign of the true fellowship is that, when a member has comfort amid his suffering, *those who fear* the Lord will rejoice together with him and feel comfort
- Whatever one of them enjoys, is counted as a gift for all of them
- According to St. Augustine, *those who fear* God, here, are the church; the body of Christ
- All God's laws are in conformity with the perfect standard of His righteousness, *Your judgments are right*
- His attention upon God's word has given the Psalmist a wise and godly perspective even in seasons of suffering



# Confidence in the Creator and His Word 119:73-80



- He can proclaim the rightness of God's *judgments* even when he is afflicted
- This was the place Job eventually came to through his long and desperate struggle through the Holy Book of Job
- He came to *know* that the *judgments* of the Lord were *right*, and even understood God's *faithfulness* in affliction
- So, the third reason to ask God the grace to observe the law, his confession of his sins
- He confessed that God's judgments are essentially just
- He confesses he deserved affliction

# Confidence in the Creator and His Word 119:73-80



- He, therefore, does not complain of God's justice, but he throw himself on His mercy, saying: *Let, I pray, Your merciful kindness be for my comfort, According to Your word to Your servant*
- The psalmist prayed on solid ground, asking on the basis of promises made in God's *word*
- With such promises, he asked for *merciful kindness*
- The promise from God's lovingkindness will comfort him when nothing else will
- *Your word to Your servant*, It was not only a word to mankind in general, or even the covenant people; it was something personal to the psalmist himself, *Your servant*

# Confidence in the Creator and His Word 119:73-80



- The psalmist prayed with the understanding that God's *tender mercies* came to him through the word *law* of God
- By staying close to God's word and letting it fill his life, he also received God's *tender mercies*
- *that I may live*, It is evident that this was uttered in view of some great tribulation by which his life was threatened
- The psalmist refers every comfort to the free generous grace of God, not to his own merit or his strong will
- He, therefore, feels indebted by his whole life to God's tender mercies by which he lives, and to God's law or commandment, in which he meditates and delights

# Confidence in the Creator and His Word 119:73-80



- *Let the proud be ashamed*, Referring here to his enemies, who appear to have been in position of power, and influence; those who prided themselves on their wealth
- These *proud* ones had *treated* him *wrongfully with falsehood*; therefore, they should be put to shame
- The psalmist asks here that they might fail of accomplishing their purposes in regard to him, Psalm 25:2-3; Job 6:20
- They were not honest; they deceived him; they were not true to their friendship
- They have been guilty of falsehood in their charges or accusations against him

# Confidence in the Creator and His Word 119:73-80



- David's prayers made Ahithophel fail in his plans
- Hezekiah's prayer meant failure for the Assyrian army
- The fasting of Esther and the Jews brought failure for Haman
- God knows how to defend His own who cry to Him
- Yet even the prayer that *the proud be ashamed* is a prayer for their good
- It is as the prayer of Asaph: *Fill their faces with shame, that they may seek Your name, O Lord*, (Psalm 83:16)
- In contrast to the *proud* who loved lies, the Psalmist loved and meditated on God's word

# Confidence in the Creator and His Word 119:73-80



- The psalmist was determined that those evil actions by the proud should not take off his thoughts from God's *precepts*
- Or divert him from his duty to his God: none of these things moved him; he still went on in the ways of God, in his worship and service, as Daniel did, when in like circumstances
- He was focusing on meditating on God's word and not on retaliation or revenge
- *Let those who fear You turn to me:* The psalmist recognized the presence of proud enemies, but he did not believe that all were against himself or God

# Confidence in the Creator and His Word 119:73-80



- There were others who feared God, and he could find companionship with them
- He wanted his experience of God's mercy show the godly the blessedness of keeping God's *testimonies*
- They had much in common – they both were those who knew God's word, *Those who know Your testimonies*
- He associating the fear of God with knowing Him, *those who fear You ... Those who know Your testimonies*
- As the believer finds trouble from the world, he prays that he may find help from the Lord's people

# Confidence in the Creator and His Word 119:73-80



- Some think this refers to the affair of Bathsheba; when some that feared the Lord, did not choose to keep company with David because he brought dishonor to God and His name by his sin
- Now this grieved David; and he desires of all things that they would turn to him again
- According to St. Augustine the one speaking here is Jesus Christ
- He says, “Because He was made sharer in our mortal state, that we might also become partakers in His Divine Nature ... He it is unto whom they that fear God turn, and who know the testimonies of God.”



# Confidence in the Creator and His Word 119:73-80



- As the psalmist compared himself with the *proud* who spoke lies, he still recognized his need for greater obedience to God
- He asked God, and depended on Him, for an obedient, *blameless*, heart and life
- The New Testament has many examples of hearts that were not *blameless*: Judas, Ananias and Sapphira, Alexander, and Demas (Matthew 26:14-16; Acts 5:1-11; 1 Timothy 1:20; 2 Timothy 4:10)
- Such examples should make us pray according to Psalm 139:23: *Search me, O God, and know my heart*

# Confidence in the Creator and His Word 119:73-80



- *That I may not be ashamed*: This is a valid desire
- The psalmist wanted a life lived *unashamed*
- The desire was for a sense of no inward shame because he was right with God and had no public shame in the eyes of others
- His obedient life, *Let my heart be blameless regarding Your statutes*, would lead to this unashamed life
- The psalmist asks God for a perfect and complete heart that is fully focused on the His *statutes* so that this shame will be forever avoided
- So, he closes as he began with a petition of prayer

# Confidence in the Creator and His Word 119:73-80



- He reminds himself of how intimately connected is the heart and his life, who he is on the inside and how he lives on the outside
- Proverbs 4:23 is an important reminder, *“Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life.”*
- Jeremiah 17:9 tells us, *“The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?”*
- The psalmist knew well this truth
- The psalmist knows he needs the Lord and the Word if he is to have a pure heart and live a blameless life

# Discussion



- What is one of the most basic assumptions one must hold onto in the midst of his trials?
- What do proud men think about the laws of God?
- Why did the psalmist specify that proud people tell lies?
- What is the benefit of afflictions according to the psalmist?
- What does the psalmist prefer over riches?

# Discussion



- Why does the psalmist owe God his obedience?
- What is the difference between a statute and a judgment?
- What makes a godly man an encouragement to those around him?
- How do the ungodly try to shame the godly? What is the root of real shame?