



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



# The Holy Book of Psalms

## Psalm 119 (Part 6)

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# Introduction

- This is part 6 of Psalm 119 which includes the 11th and the 12th sections of this Psalm, verses 81-96
- Kaph is the 11th letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and it is used at the beginning of verbs in verses; 81-88
- So, the first word in each verse begins with the letter Kaph, (some write it Caph)
- This passage of Psalm 119 proclaims that God is the answer to the things of life
- It explains the psalmist's desperation, the persecutors' evil intent, and God's faithfulness



# Introduction

- Verses 89-96 is the 12th part of the Psalm, in which each verse begins with the letter Lamed
- This portion of the Psalm begins and ends with a comparison between temporal and eternal things
- Man and the earth are temporal, but the Scriptures are eternal
- In the former section David's soul fainted, but here the good man looks out of self and perceives that the Lord does not get weary, neither is there any failure in His word
- God is faithful and has pledged His faithfulness to every generation; He does not forget anyone



# Introduction

## General Outline

- Kaph: Fainting from Affliction, Revived by God's Word 119:81-88
- Lamed: Saved by the Word Settled in Heaven 119:89-96

# Fainting from Affliction, Revived by God's Word 119:81-88



- The psalmist gives a sense of desperation
- His soul aches for God, so much that it *faints* in waiting for the salvation he needs
- Yet he has *hope in God's word*
- *Faints* has the idea of coming to the end
- Fainting is a loss of strength; a collapse
- Here the psalmist felt that his *soul* was so weak, with no strength, that it was unable to stand
- He is saying, he has no other hope, than his hope in God's unfailing Word

# Fainting from Affliction, Revived by God's Word 119:81-88



- This place of desperate yet not despairing is known to the followers of God
- The Apostle Paul related something of this in 2 Corinthians 4:8-9: *“We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed,”*
- *Your salvation,* may be understood of the coming of the Messiah, and so he speaks in the name of the Old-Testament believers; the souls of the faithful, or the prophets who, *“have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you,”* (1 Peter 1:10)

# Fainting from Affliction, Revived by God's Word 119:81-88



- Abraham saw it at a distance, and so did others, *“these all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.”* (Hebrews 11:13)
- And this is every Christian hope crying with St. John, *“Amen... come, Lord Jesus!”* (Revelation 22:20)
- *But I hope in Your word*, In contrast to the sense of weakness and failing, the psalmist found *hope* and strength in God's word
- Yet even here his *eyes fail* - he has looked so long for the promised help, and it has not come

# Fainting from Affliction, Revived by God's Word 119:81-88



- This indicates how diligently the psalmist read and studied God's word
- According to St. John Chrysostom, "David's Psalms bring forth a fountain of tears."
- *My eyes fail from searching Your word*, He studied so hard that his eyes hurt
- St. Augustine says, "Behold that praiseworthy and blessed failing, in the eyes again, but his inner eyes, not arising from infirmity of mind, but from the strength of his longing for the promise of God: for this he says, "for Your word."

# Fainting from Affliction, Revived by God's Word 119:81-88



- *When will You comfort me?*, This was why the psalmist searched so diligently; it was to find *comfort* in his present distress
- Lord, how long? is the constant cry of God's servants under affliction or persecution
- *I have become like a wineskin in smoke*: Like a bottle made of the skins of animals, as was usual in those times and countries
- Now such a bottle being hung up in a smoky chimney, would be dried and withered, and be good for nothing and would thus be symbols of distress, discomfort, and sorrow
- By affliction and sorrow, the psalmist had become to a state which would be well represented by such a bottle

# Fainting from Affliction, Revived by God's Word 119:81-88



- The psalmist felt weak, as if he were a fragile *wineskin* that had turned dry and had become black with *smoke*
- His soul and spiritual life felt dry
- It may also have respect unto the form of his body
- Some understand the image here of the good results of the discipline of suffering
- They suppose that there is a reference to the custom of making wine by putting it in the smoke, so the metaphor means that the Psalmist is being exposed to suffering to soften and mature his character, though the process is being continued so long that he is becoming unrecognizable

# Fainting from Affliction, Revived by God's Word 119:81-88



- Despite his sense of weakness, he was determined to *not forget* God's *statutes*
- Weakness would not make him *forget* God's word
- It is obvious that the psalmist has gone through an intense state of affliction, and was on the verge of despair, if it was not for his hope in the promises of God for salvation
- St. Jerome says, "He, who brings his members to death, and feels that he vainly walk in a mortal world, will not cease to say: "I became like a wineskin". (every trace of lust in me has dried out); and my knees became weak because of fasting."

# Fainting from Affliction, Revived by God's Word 119:81-88



- *How many are the days of Your servant?*, If this is to be understood of the days of his life, they were very few, as the days of every man be
- He knows that his life is but a vapor, that he is like the grass of the field which is here today and gone tomorrow
- But if of days of adversity and affliction, which seems to be the sense, they were many indeed
- This is a rhetorical question, and the point is: *what are You waiting for?! When are You going to execute judgment upon those who persecute me?!*

# Fainting from Affliction, Revived by God's Word 119:81-88



- The sense of weakness led the psalmist to despair that God would *execute judgment* against those who persecuted him
- He prays not for power to revenge himself, but that God would take to Himself the vengeance that belonged to him
- Verse 84, is one of the few verses in the Psalm that does not specifically mention God's word
- Perhaps his personal weakness and a sense of injustice have led the psalmist to such despair that he has lost focus on God's word
- The psalmist here utters what was the dread of each generation of Israel, a dread lest it should have passed away before the day of deliverance should arrive

# Fainting from Affliction, Revived by God's Word 119:81-88



- Once again, the psalmist refers to his enemies as those who are *proud*
- Those who are overly confident in themselves and have no fear of God before their eyes
- In their *pride* they persecuted him, glorying in this
- They are actively trying to trap him
- The idea of digging pits paints the picture of the hunter trying to ensnare his prey; they were deliberate in their plans against him
- They make it their business to lay traps for the psalmist
- They in this showed their enmity to God Himself

# Fainting from Affliction, Revived by God's Word 119:81-88



- This conduct, in both motive and means, is utterly against God's *Law*
- They were unjust; *not according to God's law*
- David's state was herein a type and figure of the state both of Christ and Christians
- While God's commands are *faithful* (true and trustworthy), the enemies persistently pursue him with a lie
- The psalmist found faithfulness and refuge in the *commandments* of God; this was strong contrast to the persecution he found from his enemies
- In such times, he prayed the logical prayer: *Help me!*

# Fainting from Affliction, Revived by God's Word 119:81-88



- The point is emphasized again in verse 87 through repetition
- Nothing would make the psalmist *forsake* God's word
- He would attach to it in good times and in bad times
- The psalmist was almost dead, *they almost made an end of me on earth*, yet he would not *forsake* the word of God
- The enemies were nearly successful in their objective, to destroy him
- Some interpret it as they want to cut him off from the land of promise and thus blot out his name from God's inheritance
- Either way, the point remains that *they want to kill him*, and they were nearly successful in doing so

# Fainting from Affliction, Revived by God's Word 119:81-88



- Even in the face of this clear and present danger, the psalmist remains faithful
- St. Augustine says, “There was a great slaughter of the martyrs, while proclaiming Your truth, and testifying to it; On their tongue, the psalmist cries out to God, saying: ‘Help (us); But we did not forsake Your precepts”
- *Revive me*, mentioned before (vv. 25, 37, 40, and 50)
- The psalmist looked to God for new life, for *revival*
- The request is for God to pull him out of the deep
- Yet he knew that this was not deserved, even by someone who loves God's word as he was

# Fainting from Affliction, Revived by God's Word 119:81-88



- Instead, he prayed *Revive me according to Your lovingkindness*, not according to what he deserved or had earned
- The psalmist spoke freely about his great love for God and His word
- Yet his trust was in the goodness and grace and *lovingkindness* of God, not in his own love for God and His word
- He knows God so intimately through His Word that he knows God's character and nature and can therefore appeal to God's person
- *So that I may keep the testimony of Your mouth*, Here the psalmist understood the purpose of a revived spirit within him

# Fainting from Affliction, Revived by God's Word 119:81-88



- It was not merely to enjoy a season of spiritual enjoyment; it was for a more faithful, obedient walk with God
- The psalmist rightly understood that the word of God actually came from the *mouth* of God
- God used human authors, and those human authors expressed their personality through the inspired writings, yet God so directed those human authors that what they wrote could accurately be called words from the *mouth* of God
- The Holy Bible can never get out of date, never be wrong
- It will give us the strength we need to fulfill the purpose for which God has chosen each of us

# Saved by the Word Settled in Heaven 119:89-96



- In the next eight verses the psalmist argues, from the assurance of God's promises, in persisting the observance of His law, which promises so much, both in this and the next life
- This part of the Psalm begins and ends with a comparison between temporal and eternal things
- Man and the earth are temporal, but the Holy Scriptures are eternal
- *Forever, O Lord, Your word*, The Psalmist meditated on the unchanging nature of God's word
- Because it *is settled in heaven*, it will not change on earth and is out of the reach of its critics and enemies
- What God had ordained as law would always remain law

# Saved by the Word Settled in Heaven 119:89-96



- What He had affirmed would always remain true and what He had promised would be sure forever
- The psalmist believed that the Scriptures come from *heaven* and not earth, from the *Lord* and not man
- He believed what the Apostle Paul wrote hundreds of years later in 2 Timothy 3:16: *“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.”*
- God’s Word does not become irrelevant or grow old
- It is eternally applicable because it expresses the eternal values of an eternal God

# Saved by the Word Settled in Heaven 119:89-96



- Even though it may not seem to stand firm on earth, when we see the wicked exalted, still it stands quite firm in heaven; for God will certainly carry out anything he promised
- If the believers suffer brief tribulation; it will be turned into everlasting joy; and the short glory of the wicked will be turned into eternal disgrace and punishment
- The psalmist repeats, or explains, the same idea when he adds, *Your faithfulness endures to all generations*, it stands firm too
- The psalmist believed that the *settled* word of God was a demonstration of the *faithfulness* of God, and that *faithfulness* extends across *all generations*

# Saved by the Word Settled in Heaven 119:89-96



- The generations of people change and pass away, but God's promises do not change
- God's faithfulness is not limited to a single people in a special time in a specific place but flows from generation to generation
- As St. Mary's words in her praise, *"For He who is mighty has done great things for me, And holy is His name. And His mercy is on those who fear Him From generation to generation."* (Luke 1:49-50)
- *You established the earth, and it abides,* David uses the earth as an illustration of just how permanent the faithfulness of God is

# Saved by the Word Settled in Heaven 119:89-96



- Just as the earth abides, so does the faithfulness of God
- God laid the foundation of *the earth* so firm and sure, that it cannot be removed: and though one generation has passed after another, the earth abides where it was
- And as firm and stable, and never failing, is the faithfulness of God
- The psalmist begins in verse 91 by providing evidence of the power, authority, and stability of God's Word
- The word of God itself *Your ordinances* is what established the earth and caused it to abide

# Saved by the Word Settled in Heaven 119:89-96



- God spoke the physical universe into existence and therefore there is sufficient power in His Word
- His Word stands in authority in the heavens and thus must stand as an authority over the earth
- Both of these two witnesses stand to this day to testify to the ability of God's Holy Word
- All the earth obey God's commands; all are under His control
- They show that they are His servants by the conformity of their movements to the laws
- The psalmist looked at the created order and understood that all creation ultimately serves God and His purpose

# Saved by the Word Settled in Heaven 119:89-96



- The Holy Scripture is sufficient in times of personal trial
- As if he is saying: *Because Your law is my delight, I did not perish during my affliction*
- What got him through his affliction was focusing his joy and *delight* upon God's law and word
- The psalmist knew that without his relationship with God and His word, he would not have been sustained in his season of *affliction*
- This *delight* goes beyond mere Holy Bible knowledge
- It is the relationship with God in and through His word that gives strength and spiritual nourishment

# Saved by the Word Settled in Heaven 119:89-96



- Verse 93 is another declaration of scripture's sufficiency which emphasizes the ability of God to *save* by His Word
- He uses the same word here to describe his everlasting loyalty as he did to describe the eternal authority of God's Word in the heavens
- The best evidence of our love to the word of God is to never forget it
- He is saying – *As long as Your Word lasts, so will I remain faithful to You*
- The psalmist remembered the *life-giving* power and character of God's word

# Saved by the Word Settled in Heaven 119:89-96



- It was this *life* that strengthened him in the season of *affliction*
- God's word brings *life* because it is alive, "*The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.*" (John 6:63)
- "*For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*" (Hebrews 4:12)
- Yet another declaration of sufficiency in verse 94, begins with a desperate plea to be saved
- He begins with an affirmation that he is God's own possession, *I belong to You!*

# Saved by the Word Settled in Heaven 119:89-96



- This simple, two-word prayer has for its foundation, the ownership of God
- *I am Yours*, it speaks of the wonderful relationship between the psalmist and God, flowing from the word of God
- He is God's, therefore God must save him
- *For I have sought Your precepts*, The basis of this confidence was a relationship built upon the word of God *Your precepts*
- This was not a relationship built upon feelings, but upon the solid foundation of God's word
- The psalmist returns in verse 95 to these wicked individuals who *wait for me to destroy me*

# Saved by the Word Settled in Heaven 119:89-96



- While they do their worst against him – they *wait for* him *to destroy* him – he will not fear, but find refuge in the word of God
- He comforts himself in the word of God as his protection
- These enemies are known by their fruits: wickedness
- They are known by their actions; they wait with patience
- And they are known by their intentions: the desire to destroy him
- But Holy Scripture is more than sufficient to equip and protect him
- Even though they *wait for me to destroy me*, he is completely devoted to God from the confidence that he has in God's testimonies

# Saved by the Word Settled in Heaven 119:89-96



- Verse 96 reads like the end of Ecclesiastes and carries a very similar meaning
- The psalmist claims that he has witnessed all good things, even great things, perfect and complete things come to an end
- He has seen how complete they may seem, such as wisdom and power, glory and riches, and the greatest and most perfect accomplishments and enjoyments in this world, are exceeding frail, and soon come to an end
- Yet not all is vanity; there is one thing that endures, one thing that stands forever, one thing that remains unchanged, *Your commandment is exceedingly broad*

# Saved by the Word Settled in Heaven 119:89-96



- Christ says, “*Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away*” (Matthew 24:35)
- The psalmist knows that the words he reads are from the same One who spoke the world into being, and therefore carry the same power
- The Word of God has such a height and depth of doctrine and mysteries in it as can never be fully reached and comprehended, and such a breadth as is not to be measured
- *Broad*, both for extent and for continuance; it is useful to all people in all times and conditions, and for all purposes, to inform, direct, revive, comfort, sanctify, and save

# Saved by the Word Settled in Heaven 119:89-96



- It is of everlasting truth and significance; it will never deceive nor forsake those who trust it, as all worldly things will
- The psalmist set his mind upon the Lord and contemplated His Word and faithfulness; and though he faced hardship, he was strengthened and sustained by learning and living God's Word, which is boundless and never fails
- According to St. Basil, the commandment to love God, our neighbor and our enemy, is an extremely broad commandment, for it covers all
- And according to St. Augustine love is the breadth of the commandment



# Discussion

- How would you describe the human being in the words of the psalmist?
- How are the proud described in verse 85?
- What sort of complaints does the psalmist make to God concerning the persecution he faces?
- What does it mean to be a wineskin in the smoke?
- How do Christians respond to persecution?



# Discussion

- Discuss ways that God's Word is faithful from generation to generation.
- What does it mean that "all things" are the servants of God?
- What does it mean that God has given the psalmist life?
- What's implied in the heart of the psalmist in his cry for God to "save" him?



# Discussion

- What is the priority of God's Word in providing protection for life? Why? How does that work?
- Discuss the reality of imperfection in this world. Why are things imperfect? What's the cause of imperfection?
- What does it mean that God's Word is "exceedingly broad?" Are there any areas of life that it does not have significance and authority?