



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



# The Holy Book of Psalms

## Psalm 119 (Part 7)

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# Introduction

- This is part 7 of Psalm 119 which includes the 13th and the 14th sections, or Hebrews letters Mem and Nun of this Psalm, verses 97-112
- Mem is the 13th letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and it is used at the beginning of verbs in verses, 97-104
- So, the first word in each verse begins with the letter Mem
- This part of the Psalm is a pure song of praise which contains no single petition from the psalmist, no lamentation, and no complaints
- The previous section of the Psalm proclaimed a bold confidence in God and in His Word



# Introduction

- This part is a simple honest declaration of love and devotion to God and to His Word
- The main point is that the commandments of God provide great wisdom and benefit to those who will embrace them
- Verses 105-112 is the 14th part of the Psalm, in which each verse begins with the letter Nun
- This part begins with one of the most well-known verses of this Psalm, *Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path*
- The psalmist gives us a beautiful view and thought here that we can all acknowledge and relate to





# Introduction

- The Word of God is truly the light that directs our steps
- God's Word lights our path as we walk through the darkness of this world one step at a time
- God not only reveal His will to us; but He direct us in that will
- According to St. Cyril the Great, faith is the "lamp"; and the Word of the incarnate God is the "Light"; He says: "The Word of God is the subject of our faith; and is the light. For the lamp is the faith, being 'the true light which gives light to every man who comes into the world' (John 1:9)."



# Introduction

## General Outline

- Mem: The Sweetness of God's Word 119:97-104
- Nun: Absolute Confidence in God's Word 119:105-112

# The Sweetness of God's Word

## 119:97-104



- The psalmist begins with a broad but purposeful statement, *Oh, how I love Your law!*
- The psalmist has declared his love for the word of God, twice before, (verses 47-48)
- Yet here, his expression is more passionate
- His devotion to God and His word has built a love-relationship between him and God's word
- To *love* means to be committed, to be devoted to someone or something
- The superficial Christian may read and understand and even, in an outward sense, obey the word of God



# The Sweetness of God's Word

## 119:97-104



- But only the spiritual man *loves* it; he lives as if he could not live without the word of God
- When Israel was commanded to *love* God with their whole being (Deut. 6:5), they were commanded to be devoted to Him and to be set apart for Him
- David loved the word of God that it was his *meditation*
- He is consumed by God's Word as he reads it, studies it, and seeks to obey it
- This is so much more than a temporary emotional passion
- This level of dedication and commitment can only be described as *love*

# The Sweetness of God's Word

## 119:97-104



- It was his *meditation* not only in the night, when he was silent and solitary, and had nothing else to do, but *all the day*
- He was full of the word of God, good thoughts were interwoven and knitted with his common thoughts
- St. Augustine says, “By such love lust is driven out: lust, which repeatedly opposes our performing the commandments of the law, when ‘the flesh lusts against the spirit:’ against which the spirit lusting, ought so to love the law of God, that it be its study during the whole day.”



# The Sweetness of God's Word

## 119:97-104



- The psalmist makes three great comparisons in the next three verses
- The first is comparing the wisdom of his enemies to God's Word
- He is wiser than all of these groups because he has what they do not have; that is, God's Word
- *my enemies*, are the same wicked individuals who have forsaken the law of God (v. 53) and have on several occasions sought to trap (v. 61) and destroy (v. 95) the psalmist
- The fact that they have forsaken God's Word makes them, foolish
- Wisdom means skill

# The Sweetness of God's Word

## 119:97-104



- Wisdom assumes the knowledge to do something but emphasizes the ability and the practice of applying that knowledge
- If the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 9:10) or even the beginning of knowledge (Proverbs 1:7), then the psalmist is at a huge advantage when it comes to his enemies who have rejected God's Word
- He had wisdom by the word of God as the means, *through Your commandments*
- The knowledge of God's Law gives a wisdom and an understanding significantly above the guile and deceit of worldly men

# The Sweetness of God's Word

## 119:97-104



- He boasts in nothing but what has been given him to have and to hold forever more
- *For they are ever with me*, That is, the commandments of God, or His law
- They were his counsellors, with whom on all occasions he consulted, and so became wiser than his enemies
- These were always near him, in his heart and in his mouth
- He was ever thinking and speaking of them, and so did not forget the instructions they gave him; they were ever before his eyes, as the rule of his conduct



# The Sweetness of God's Word

## 119:97-104



- As for his *teachers*, he states that his *understanding* is greater than theirs
- This second comparison is not to suggest that his teachers are the same as his *enemies*, but simply that they, like his enemies, are not standing upon a firm foundation of Holy Scripture
- Perhaps he is referring to those who had given him instruction in early years of his life
- By constant meditation on the law of God, he had, in the progress of years, advanced to a point beyond that to which they had reached

# The Sweetness of God's Word

## 119:97-104



- Clearly the psalmist's point is not the superiority of his own stricter interpretation of the law to the lenient interpretation of his teachers
- But the superiority of the law to all other sources of instruction as a fountain of wisdom, prudence, and discernment
- He may also mean *teachers* of secular knowledge
- Such teachers have often no spiritual knowledge or discernment
- They are wise in their special subject of learning
- But the psalmist is preoccupied with God's *testimonies*
- Once again, we see the word *meditation*; he is consumed with and contemplates upon God's Word

# The Sweetness of God's Word

## 119:97-104



- St. Augustine wonders, “Who is he who had more understanding than all his teachers? Who, I ask, is he, who dares to prefer himself in understanding above all the Prophets, who not only by speaking taught with so excellent authority those who lived with them, but also their posterity by writing?...What is here said, could not have been spoken in Solomon’s person....I recognize plainly Him who had more understanding than His teachers, since when He was a boy of twelve years of age, Jesus remained behind in Jerusalem, and was found by His parents after three days’ space, ‘sitting in the temple among the doctors, hearing them and asking them questions.’”



# The Sweetness of God's Word

## 119:97-104



- St. Augustine continues and says, “It is very difficult to understand this of the Person of the Word; unless we can comprehend that it is the same thing for the Son to be taught as to be begotten of the Father....’He took upon Himself the form of a servant;’ for when He had assumed this form, men of more advanced age might think Him fit to be taught as a boy; but He whom the Father taught, had more understanding than all His teachers. ‘For Your testimonies,’ He says, ‘are my study.’ For this reason, He had more understanding than all His teachers, because He studied the testimonies of God, which, as concerning Himself, He knew better than they, when He spoke these words: ‘You have sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth. Yet I do not receive testimony from man,”

# The Sweetness of God's Word

## 119:97-104



- Next come the elders in his comparison
- *the ancients*, This is a reference to the older generation
- Normally we highly value those who have lived through the same trials and struggles that we face every day
- But experience apart from God's Word is of limited value
- Advanced age does not necessarily give wisdom
- The psalmist claims a greater understanding than those who have more experience, but only *because* he actually obeys the Word of God
- If experience does not lead one to obedience, then that experience has no value

# The Sweetness of God's Word

## 119:97-104



- God's Word is superior to any human knowledge or wisdom in every area
- The psalmist is not a better, more intelligent person than his *enemies, teachers, or ancients*
- It is because he possesses, *they are ever with me*, is preoccupied, *Your testimonies are my meditation*, and practices God's Word, *I keep Your precepts*, that enables him to act with skill, think with discernment, and behave with intelligence



# The Sweetness of God's Word

## 119:97-104



- In vv. 98-100 the clarity, consistency, and completeness of the Word of God was presented
- The psalmist was sure to include his own responsibility (to possess, preoccupy, and practice), but here that responsibility is even more the focus
- The first dedicated step looks at what he has to do, *restrained*
- The psalmist is proactive in taking the necessary precautions of making sure his feet do not go where they were not supposed to go
- The psalmist understood that restraining himself from evil would also help him understand God's word better

# The Sweetness of God's Word

## 119:97-104



- He took heed not to walk in the paths of the wicked, who have no law but their own desires, the law of sin and of the flesh
- This separation from evil is not a negative thing but comes with an amazingly positive result
- These barriers and boundaries that the Psalmist placed upon his own life results in obedience
- If we *love* our God and *love* His Word, then we will not go where He forbids, speak what He prohibits, or do what He reject
- To be a Christian is to live a guarded life
- *“Be holy, for I am holy.”* (1 Peter 1:16)

# The Sweetness of God's Word

## 119:97-104



- We ought to be holy, but this holiness is measured in what we are united and attached to not what we separate from
- The personal connection the psalmist had with God through His word encouraged a faithful walk
- How could he *depart* from the instruction that God Himself has *taught* him?
- The psalmist had *not departed from God's judgments*; he had not chosen any other rule than the word of God, nor had he willfully deviated from that rule
- According to St. Augustine what made the psalmist fear, and restrain his feet from every evil way is that God Himself *have taught me*



# The Sweetness of God's Word

## 119:97-104



- The wonderful pleasure and delight which the psalmist took in the word of God; it was *sweet to his taste, sweeter than honey*
- Time spent in God's word is a *sweet* experience to be thankful for
- The psalmist could not describe the level of the sweetness, so he cries, *How sweet*
- He speaks as if he wanted words to express the satisfaction he took in the discoveries of the divine will and grace: he found no pleasure to be comparable to it
- According to St. John Chrysostom, not every soul will find sweetness in the Word of God, but only the upright and sound soul, as the sick cannot taste the sweetness of food

# The Sweetness of God's Word

## 119:97-104



- The true *understanding* gained by the psalmist gave him discernment and the power to persevere and *hate every false way*
- He proves that he derived great pleasure from God's law, because it always creates an easy conscience, for *Through Your precepts I get understanding*
- *Your precepts*, helped him to a good lead; to discern between truth and falsehood, good and evil
- He has become prudent and wise through the teachings of God's commandments, *Therefore I hate every false way*
- From the wisdom he acquired by constant meditation on the law, he not only abstained from sin, but he even hated all sinful actions

# The Sweetness of God's Word

## 119:97-104



- As this section begins with a profession of love, it ends with a resolution to hate
- To love God is to hate all that is contrary to God
- To love God's Word is to be committed to knowing, understanding, and obeying it
- But it also means hating all that contradicts, undermines, or misrepresents it
- Such hatred is a wonderful protection of the purity of the soul, and generates great confidence in God, which leads to unspeakable joy, to a peace and tranquility far and beyond all the treasures and pleasures of this world



# Absolute Confidence in God's Word 119:105-112



- Knowing the value of God's law as the guide of life the psalmist is resolved to keep it, whatever may be the risk
- Verses 105-112 are about putting confidence into action in a few basic steps
- Verses 105-106 explain the importance of understanding what Scripture is and fully commit to it
- Verses 107-110 are about understanding the appropriate response to affliction
- And verses 111-112 are about understanding the purpose
- The word of God is to direct in all doubts and difficulties, and to comfort in all fears and distresses

# Absolute Confidence in God's Word 119:105-112



- God's word is a light to guide him safely as he walk through the darkness of this world one step at a time and in the midst of the dangers of his path
- The Word of God is compared to a small lamp that gives enough light to see where the psalmist is to place his next step
- He would not know where to step without the guidance of God's word
- It prevents his stumbling over obstacles, or failing down cliffs, or wandering off into paths which would lead into danger, or would turn him away altogether from the right path
- The need for light assumes that there is darkness

# Absolute Confidence in God's Word 119:105-112



- He calls it *a lamp to my feet* because it gives light, not only to the eyes, to have understanding and wisdom, but also to the feet to walk in the right path
- *and a light*, It is compared also to a light, a greater and major light source, that exposes the entire path upon which he steps
- The whole Holy Scripture is a light shining in a dark place; a lamp to be carried in the hand of a believer, while he passes through this dark world
- The same is said by Solomon, “*For the commandment is a lamp, And the law a light;*” (Proverbs 6:23)
- The use of light assumes action



# Absolute Confidence in God's Word 119:105-112



- There is an unspoken assumption that once the psalmist sees the next step, he will take it
- Once he sees where the barrier is, he will avoid it
- To be able to discern that he is standing in the ditch, is utterly useless unless there are steps taken to return to the path
- The psalmist is not only aware of the fact that God's Word reveals where he is standing, where his next step should be placed; but he is also committed to it, *I have sworn and confirmed That I will keep Your righteous judgments*

# Absolute Confidence in God's Word 119:105-112



- The first step in turning confidence into action is understanding that only God's Word can pierce the darkness and being committed to using only God's Word to discern the course of action
- The psalmist makes a binding oath and is committed to stand for the expressed purpose of obeying God's Word
- The psalmist showed a determination of life to obey the word of God
- It was a double-decision, both *sworn and confirmed*
- It is not be a mere purpose; it must be accomplished

# Absolute Confidence in God's Word 119:105-112



- According to St. Augustine, the oath here means a persistence on walking in the light, and on keeping the judgments of God
- He says, “The righteous judgments of God are kept by faith; when we do not assume that any good deed would ever go without a reward; nor any sin would ever be unpunished; according to the righteous judgments of God.”
- *I am afflicted very much*, Unwavering and determined observance of the law however has exposed him to persecution
- Therefore, he prays God to preserve his life according to His promise



# Absolute Confidence in God's Word 119:105-112



- The form of the affliction is not mentioned
- However, if the author is David, it is known that there were numerous occasions in his life where he was *afflicted*
- In a spiritual sense, it points to the corruptions of the heart, to the temptations of Satan, so his spirit fell under the weight of the affliction
- But despite his many problems and pains, he looked to God's word for a reviving of life, and for this to happen *according to His word*
- He knows the Word of God and knows that God will not abandon him

# Absolute Confidence in God's Word 119:105-112



- Responding to affliction requires us to know well the Word of God and fully trust the promises that He has made
- *Accept, I pray, the freewill offerings of my mouth*, The psalmist presented these words to the Lord as if they were a sacrifice brought to an altar
- This term is found throughout Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers when referring to the various sacrifices and offerings that Israel was supposed to offer and the manner in which they were supposed to offer them so that they might be acceptable to God

# Absolute Confidence in God's Word 119:105-112



- They were *freewill offerings* meant to show his love and devotion to God
- These are not *the freewill offerings* of his hands, but of his mouth; the spiritual sacrifices of prayer praise
- His desire is that God finds his offering *acceptable*
- He knows that he can only approach God with clean hands and a clean heart
- St. Augustine says, “By the freewill offerings of the mouth are well understood the sacrifices of praise, offered up in the confession of love, not from the fear of necessity.”



# Absolute Confidence in God's Word 119:105-112



- His affliction does not give excuse for superficial worship
- This prayer is offered in humility with a desire to truly worship
- These repeated cries for teaching show his humility as a man of God
- A true disciple is always a disciple, a learner
- For though he was wiser than his enemies, and had more understanding than his teachers, or than the ancients; (vv. 98-100), yet he needed to be instructed more and more, and was desirous of being taught by God

# Absolute Confidence in God's Word 119:105-112



- Verses 109 and 110, compare the reality of danger with steadfast faithfulness
- The expression – *My life is continually in my hand* – is a common phrase (Judges 12:3, 1 Samuel 19:5, 28:21) that indicates one has knowingly placed themselves in a dangerous situation
- The psalmist is saying that his life was constantly in danger
- In spite of the danger to which he is exposed, and the need to defend his life, he does not allow his mind to be turned from meditating on God's law
- According to some translation it is *my Soul* and not *my life*

# Absolute Confidence in God's Word 119:105-112



- And St. Augustine says, “Some copies read, ‘in my hand:’ but most, ‘in Your hand; and this latter is indeed easy. For ‘the souls of the righteous are in God’s hand: in whose hand are both we and our words.’ ... If it is perhaps said, ‘My soul is in my hands,’ in this sense, as if he offered it to God to be revived.”
- The psalmist offer an explanation in verse 110, of the preceding verse
- *The wicked* have lined his path with traps and nets just waiting for him to fall into one
- He is consciously aware of the reality of physical danger, yet he does not waver



# Absolute Confidence in God's Word 119:105-112



- His life is threatened by enemies, but no dangers or persecutions tempt him to, *strayed from Your precepts*
- He kept on in the way of his duty; did not turn his back from that, or depart from his God, and his worship, to escape the snares of bad men
- The psalmist rejoiced in God's word with a deep heart-felt joy; therefore, the *testimonies* became his *heritage forever*
- He regarded it as one does a rich inheritance
- He chose it as his portion above all other things
- The psalmist's joy finds its source in the objective nature of God's Word

# Absolute Confidence in God's Word 119:105-112



- This joy is turned into motivation in v. 112
- It is because he has tasted and seen that the Lord is good that he turns his heart to actively obey and perform the rules and regulations of God
- He refers to an act of choice on his part, meaning that he had preferred this course, or that he had made this a sincere intention
- The theme of committing to God's word is once again emphasized
- The psalmist would never forsake God's word – never stop reading, learning, meditating, and especially obeying it and this is no temporary strategy, but it is a lifelong battle plan – *Forever even to the end*

# Absolute Confidence in God's Word 119:105-112



- With every dangerous step, how can he ever hope to endure *forever, to the very end?*
- He can, because the same God who lights and sustains him for one step can do it for every step, *to the very end*
- St. Augustine says, “He who says, ‘I have inclined my heart’, has previously said: ‘Incline my heart to Your testimonies’ (36) so that we may understand that it is at once a divine gift, and an act of free will. But are we to fulfil the righteousness of God for ever? Those works which we perform in regard to the need of our neighbors, cannot be everlasting, any more than their need; but if we do not do them from love, there is no righteousness; if we do them from love, that love is everlasting, and an everlasting reward is in store for it.”



# Discussion



- Why does the psalmist love God's law?
- As the psalmist internalizes the commandments and testimonies of God, he becomes wiser than three different groups of people. What are they?
- What other Psalm refers to meditating on the law of God both day and night?
- What would change about the way one goes about his life if God's Word became his "meditation all the day"?

# Discussion



- In verses 100–104, what does David say he has gained from God’s Word? How does he gain that?
- What are the 4 main features of the Holy Bible that make it important to study?
- How has God’s Word been a “lamp” for you the way David describes in verse 105? How did it provide clarity in a time of uncertainty?
- Why does he need God’s lamp to lighten his pathway?

# Discussion



- Does the psalmist appear to be afraid of losing his life? Why or why not?
- How are verses 110 and 1 Peter 5:8 tied together?
- What does David describe as the source of his joy in verse 111?
- What is his inheritance? And how he described it?