



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Book of Psalms

Psalm 119 (Part 11)

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Introduction

- This is part 11 of Psalm 119 which includes the 21st and the 22nd sections, or Hebrews letters Shin, or Schin, and Tau, verses 161-176
- Shin is the 21st letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and it is used at the beginning of verbs in verses, 161-168
- So, the first word in each verse begins with the letter Shin
- In the previous section, there was a remarkable number of urgent pleas and requests
- This part of the Psalm contains no petitions
- The psalmist in this section declares his steadfast faithfulness to God



Introduction

- The psalmist's heart is filled with awe, joy, love, and gratitude by God's law
- Therefore, he has been diligent in its observance
- It is not the boasting of the Pharisee, but the honest profession of a good conscience
- Part 22nd of this Psalm is verses 169-176 in which each verse begins with the letter Tau
- In the last section of the Psalm, the psalmist closes with a humble prayer
- The psalmist asks to be given understanding



Introduction

- He knows God's Word and the promises it contains, and he wants to understand how God is honoring those promises
- So, he prays in accordance with God's will revealed in His Word and asks God to listen to his prayer and move in his life
- In this final part, the psalmist takes his thoughts to a higher level, a greater depth, a more powerful vigorous eagerness and devotion



Introduction

General Outline

- Shin: In Awe of God's Word 119:161-168
- Tau: Sought by God and His Word 119:169-176

In Awe of God's Word

119:161-168



- The psalmist again refers to his enemies as *princes*, men of authority and position
- Back in v. 23 these princes were joined in conspiracy against him but here they are actively pursuing him
- Their intentions are now being acted out
- Those who believe that David was the author of this great Psalm know that David was indeed persecuted by *princes without a cause*
- These were either the princes of the Philistines at the court of Achish

In Awe of God's Word

119:161-168



- Or the princes of Israel, who joined in the conspiracy with Absalom
- Or the princes in Saul's court who suggested that David had evil plans against the king, and pursued him from place to place on the mountains, 1 Samuel 29:4
- Their obvious question should be: why? Why are these *Princes* targeting the Psalmist?
- There is no reason, *without a cause*
- David had neither openly nor secretly opposed their power, and therefore, this made their oppression more inexcusable

In Awe of God's Word

119:161-168



- Rather than be consumed by his innocent persecution, rather than tremble in fear from the very real concern of being targeted by powerful princes, the psalmist trembles at what God has said
- His concern is exclusively pointed to pleasing his God
- He lacks any fear of man and is consumed by a real and holy fear of the Almighty
- Difficult trials – even persecution by those in authority – would not make the psalmist lose his *awe* of God's *word*
- He did not have a conditional appreciation of the word of God; he loved it in good times and bad

In Awe of God's Word

119:161-168



- He might have been overcome by awe of the princes had it not been that a greater fear drove out the less, and he was persuaded by awe of God's word
- His loyalty to the law has not been shaken by the unjustified hostility of the civil authorities; rather has he feared to offend God
- Nothing discouraged him from manifesting his obedience to the law of God
- According to St. Augustine it is the Church here talking, he says, "We know what persecutions the body of Christ, that is, the holy Church, suffered from the kings of the earth. Let us therefore here also recognize the words of the Church."

In Awe of God's Word

119:161-168



- He continues and says, “For how had the Christians injured the kingdoms of the earth ... ? Did their King forbid His soldiers to pay and to render due service to the kings of the earth? Says He not to the Jews who were striving to calumniate Him, ‘Render unto Cesar the things that are Cesar’s, and unto God the things that are God’s’? Did He not even in His own Person pay tribute from the mouth of a fish?”
- *I rejoice at Your word*, The psalmist took a pleasure in reading it, hearing it, and meditating on it
- He views the precepts of the Law as a real treasure
- The original Hebrew for *treasure* is in the sense of spoil from battle

In Awe of God's Word

119:161-168



- The degree of that pleasure is *as one that finds great spoil*
- This supposes a victory over the enemy
- He likens the promise of God to *treasure, spoil*
- Understanding this comparison is important
- The warrior of that time was rarely compensated for his services
- Their payment would be contingent upon victory and would come in the form of spoil taken from the enemy
- A warrior would rejoice not only in the victory itself, but also in the rewards that come from that victory
- The psalmist recognizes that there are rich rewards in the promise of God that he can benefit from

In Awe of God's Word

119:161-168



- The scholar Origen says, “In every spiritual battle against the devil, the believer comes out a conqueror, and a bearer of a multitude of spoils, new depths in his fellowship with God, and a greater enjoyment of the fruits of the Holy Spirit.”
- One who truly *loves* the pure truth of God will naturally *hate* lies
- The psalmist not only rejects falsehood but finds it vile, wicked, shameful and disgraceful
- On the other hand, he *loves* God's law
- The psalmist is so committed to God's Word, which is truth, that he *hates* anything that contradicts, undermines, or devalues this righteous instruction

In Awe of God's Word

119:161-168



- The sin of lying belongs to Satan, the father of lies, *“You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.”* (John 8:44)
- The goodness and the glory of God's word, *Your righteous judgments*, prompted the psalmist to *praise*
- This praise was constant and continual *seven times a day*
- According to St. Augustine, number 7 generally refers to absolute perfection

In Awe of God's Word

119:161-168



- *Seven times a day I praise You* means 'I shall never stop praising You'.... Seven times means all time
- How often David praised God-*Seven times a day*, that is, not only every day, but *Seven times* every day
- Some affirm that David is here to be understood literally, he did pray *seven times a day*
- St. Athanasius says, "Let us then watch the day and the night like David who gave thanks for the sake of God's righteous judgments 'seven times a day'; as well as at midnight."

In Awe of God's Word

119:161-168



- The greatest and truest praise that can be bestowed on anyone is to say they love God's law; for if they love the law, they love Him who gave the law
- And if they love Him, they love everything belong to Him; and thus, they have no enemy; they are at peace with all
- A sense of perfect peace and rest belongs to those who love and keep God's Law
- By the same process of reasoning, *nothing causes them to stumble* to him who loves God's law because he who loves the law cannot break the law
- They would not fall into sin

In Awe of God's Word

119:161-168



- *nothing causes them to stumble*, For he, who enjoys the true peace of God, which springs from his love for His holy name, and his strife to obey His commandment, nothing whatsoever will cause him to stumble, but he will say together with the true believers: *“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.”* (Romans 8:28)
- No tribulation, distress, or oppression, that may dwell upon them, will cause them to stumble, as they trust in the righteous judgments of God, and in His exalted care
- Their peace comes from their depths and their fellowship with God, not from the circumstances

In Awe of God's Word

119:161-168



- *I hope for Your salvation*, Either temporal salvation and deliverance from enemies, and from afflictions, which God had promised, and therefore he had reason to hope for
- Or spiritual and eternal salvation
- The psalmist here displays the kind of active faith and trust that saves
- He had faith in God for *salvation*; yet it was a faith that could also say, *I do Your commandments*
- This is the kind of living faith that was so strongly expressed by St. James (James 2:14-26)

In Awe of God's Word

119:161-168



- The idea of *hope* is not ever wishful thinking
- The Holy Bible uses several different terms to communicate this idea, but all of them speak of a firm and fixed expectation and anticipation of what will most certainly happen
- To hope for God's salvation is to be certain of its coming and assume its arrival
- God's people cannot hope for God's salvation, unless they set themselves to do His commandments, "*Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city.*" (Revelation 22:14)

In Awe of God's Word

119:161-168



- The psalmist kept the word of God not only with his outward actions, but also with his *soul*
- His love to the word of God was deeply rooted, not superficial
- The psalmist states that his *soul* – the entirety of his being – obeys the *testimonies* of God
- Why does he do this?
- Because he is fully committed, he *loves* them all *exceedingly*
- For the psalmist, the knowledge that *all my ways are before You* prompted obedience
- He knew that the God who gave the word also observed his life

In Awe of God's Word

119:161-168



- With the courage of a good conscience he appeals to God's omniscience in proof of the sincerity of his purpose, God knows all his *ways*
- Both God's *precepts* and His *testimonies* are carefully obeyed by the Psalmist
- Why? Because everything that he says, thinks, and does – all of his *ways* – occur in the very presence of the Almighty
- This is in contrast to the many who live as if God does not observe *all...ways* of a man

Sought by God and His Word

119:169-176



- The psalmist has written about God's Word, using the words law, testimonies, way, statutes, commandments, precepts, ordinances, and sayings to portray different aspects of God's Word
- Now, in the last part of the Psalm, he closes with a humble prayer
- The entire section is a conversation between the psalmist and his God
- The *cry* of the psalmist is an expression of *prayer*, a plea to gain *understanding according to Your word*
- The word *cry* indicates a heavy burden or a deep sorrow

Sought by God and His Word

119:169-176



- His petition here is, that his prayer might be heard
- It might come into the very presence of God; that there might be no obstructions to its reaching where God was
- He is praying that nothing from his unworthiness, from his past sins, from his ignorance, prevent its coming before God
- He wanted his thoughts to be transformed *according* to the word of God
- He made this request before on several occasions (vv. 27, 34, 73, 125, 144) and it continues to be a plea for God to not just *give* but to *enable* or even *make him* understand

Sought by God and His Word

119:169-176



- This is a cry for divine discernment
- *understanding according to Your word*, Which means to be able to discern things in light of what God's Word has said and apply them
- *Let my supplication come before You*, This is another reference to prayer by the psalmist, this time a prayer for deliverance *according to Your word*
- He wanted deliverance, but wanted it only as it was consistent with God's revealed word and will
- Every petition is urged upon the assurance of a promise, *according to Your word*

Sought by God and His Word

119:169-176



- His desire is for God to hear and grant his petition to think and live in perfect harmony with God's revealed will and word
- *My lips shall utter praise*, Like water flowing from a fountain, as the word signifies
- The psalmist desires for praise to pour forth from his lips
- The psalmist feels that his prayer for understanding (v. 169b) is answered, or just about to be answered, and that therefore it is appropriate for him to *utter praise*
- He now promises to return thanks on getting the grace he so often asked

Sought by God and His Word

119:169-176



- When God's grace shall so enlighten and assist him to keep His commandments then, in the fulness of his inward joy, and in acknowledgment of so great a favor, *My lips shall utter praise* and thanksgiving, because "*For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.*" (Matthew 12:34)
- When God opens the understanding, opens the heart, and so opens the lips, it is that the mouth may *utter praise*
- The psalmist's *lips* did not praise God by nature; he had to be *taught* God's truth, and taught from God Himself
- Those that are taught of God have a great deal of reason to be thankful

Sought by God and His Word

119:169-176



- The psalmist wanted his *lips.... tongue* to both *praise* God and to *speak of His word*
- The psalmist moves from a spontaneous reaction of praise to a premeditated determination to praise
- He says that he will not only praise God, but that he will teach mankind, and prove to them how full of justice are the *commandments* of God
- *My tongue shall speak of Your word*, he will announce God's precepts to man, and he will teach them that *all Your commandments are righteousness*

Sought by God and His Word

119:169-176



- He wishes for his tongue to be utilized in singing God's *promise*
- God's *commandments* are all based on justice; and it is, therefore, they should be observed by all
- He was determined that others would hear him *praise* God, and *speak* of His *word*
- Knowing the purity of God's word made the Psalmist want to *speak* of it to others
- He was confident in his convictions
- The topic of his praise would always be God's words and commandments, proclaiming His justice and righteousness

Sought by God and His Word

119:169-176



- St. Augustine says, “When he says that he will declare these things, he becomes a minister of the word. For though God teach within, nevertheless ‘faith comes from hearing: and how do they hear without a preacher?’ (Romans 17:14). For, because ‘God gives the increase,’ (1 Corinthians 3:7), we have no excuse not to plant or water.”

Sought by God and His Word

119:169-176



- The psalmist now expresses his desire for God to act
- The Holy Bible often uses the imagery of the *hand* or the *arm* as an indication of power, might, and ability
- This desire is for God's *hand* (His ability and might) to be ready in position for the expressed purpose of helping the Psalmist
- He pleads three reasons for an answer to his prayers
- The first one is in verse 173, *I have chosen Your precepts*, he has deliberately determined to obey God's precepts
- The psalmist felt he could boldly ask for God's *help*, because he had chosen to love and keep the word of God

Sought by God and His Word

119:169-176



- The psalmist does not desire God's help on the basis of his personal superiority but on the basis of the fact that he *already belongs* to God
- He, the child of God, prays to God for understanding and deliverance that is perfectly in line with God's own character, word, and will
- His motivation is purely driven by person of God, the nature of His Word, and his own position as God's possession
- In verse 174 he pleads the second reason for an answer to his prayers which is that he *delight in God's law*

Sought by God and His Word

119:169-176



- He gives a reason for asking so pressingly for *salvation*; and that is, because he wishes for it above and beyond anything he ever desired
- As it is really the only object worthy of such desire, it being the only thing that can well satisfy man's desires
- And, as it will not be sufficient to have a desire for salvation without observing the commandments of God, he, therefore, adds, *And Your law is my delight*, he will always, therefore, think on it, and exercise himself in keeping it
- Not only he *delight* in it, but it is his *delight*, the greatest delight

Sought by God and His Word

119:169-176



- To delight in something assumes joy, value, adherence, appreciation, and commitment
- *Let my soul live*, The psalmist desires the continuance of his natural life, not for his own personal advantage, nor for the sake of his family, nor with any worldly and selfish views; but for the glory of God, and for the sake of praising Him
- The object of the life for which he has prayed so often—life prolonged, revived, invigorated, freed from the persecutions and trials, is just this, that his whole self may *praise* God

Sought by God and His Word

119:169-176



- His devotion has been no unwilling reluctant service, but his constant delight; this is the third reason to answer his prayer
- His love for and dedication to the word of God has made him more spiritually *dependent* upon God
- The psalmist needed: Understanding (v. 169); Deliverance (v. 170); Ability to worship God rightly (vv. 171-172); Power to live an upright life (vv. 173-174); and Strength to persevere (v. 175)
- *And let Your judgments help me*, Further and advance him in glorifying God; let them be the matter of his praise and let them help to make him fit for that work
- We are in need of the divine help to keep the truth forever

Sought by God and His Word

119:169-176



- And not to falter between truth and vanity as we read in 1 Kings 18:21: *“And Elijah came to all the people, and said, “How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.”*
- He who has the truth would seek God’s help to keep the commandments; as long as he keeps God’s judgments in his memory in the time of distress
- So after all his professions of fidelity and constancy, even including an explicit declaration that in spite of intimidation he had not gone astray from God’s commandments (v. 110), the psalmist concludes with a confession of weakness and failure

Sought by God and His Word

119:169-176



- He acknowledges that he has *gone astray like a lost sheep* while at the same moment he pleads as the reason why God should not forsake him that he has not forgotten God's commandments
- *Seek Your servant*, as the Good shepherd seeks a wandering sheep to bring it back again, Ezekiel 34:12
- The confession of failure is not inconsistent with the profession of devotion
- As in Psalm 19:12-14, which may have been in the psalmist's mind, the thought of the law naturally leads up to the thought of his own weakness and shortcoming and need to be brought back when he wanders

Sought by God and His Word

119:169-176



- If he has sinned, it is a temporary and involuntary deviation
- His will and purpose to serve God are unchanged, and he prays that God will not abandon him
- He concludes the Psalm with a penitent sense of his own sin and believing dependence on God's grace
- Even though he is a man who longs for God's word, loves God's word, obeys God's word, and despises any and all who contradict God's word he remains vulnerable
- This is a confession of his constant and continued need for God to guide and protect him



Discussion

- How do the believers survive persecutions?
- What or who should we find in the words of Holy Scripture?
- How many times a day does the psalmist praise the judgments of God?
- What are the two things that mark a Christian in the book of Revelation and in verse 166 of this Psalm?



Discussion

- What results from a life of obedience? And what motivates a life of obedience?
- What specifically is the psalmist requesting from the Lord in verses 169-170? What instrument or means does he trust the Lord will use to grant his requests? What does He commit to do in response to God's answer?
- What hope and/or encouragement does one find in vs. 176? Explain.