

Psalm 119 and the Last Night of our Lord

Resurrection Meditations on Psalm 119

Vs	Psalm 119
1	א (aleph, ') Ah, blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law (<i>torah</i>) of the LORD!
2	Also, blessed are they who keep his testimonies (<i>edah</i>), seeking him with their whole heart,
3	Always do no wrong, but walk in his ways (<i>derek</i>)!
4	Above all, you have commanded your precepts (<i>piqqud</i>) to be kept diligently.
5	Aye , that my ways may be steadfast in keeping your statutes (<i>choq</i>)!
6	At that time I shall not be ashamed, my eyes fixed on all your commandments (<i>mitsvah</i>).
7	An upright heart will praise you, when I learn your righteous rules (<i>mishpat</i>).
8	As I keep your statutes (<i>choq</i>); do not utterly forsake me!
9	ב (bet, b) Best way to keep a young man's way pure? By guarding it according to your word (<i>debar</i>).
10	Be thou the quest of my whole heart; let me not wander from your commandments (<i>mitsvah</i>).
11	Buried deep in my heart , your word (<i>imrah</i>) shall keep me from sinning against you.
12	Blessed are you, O LORD; teach me your statutes (<i>choq</i>)!
13	By these lips I declare all the rules (<i>mishpat</i>) of your mouth.
14	Boldly I delight in the way of your testimonies (<i>eduth</i>), as much as in all riches.
15	Burrowing deep, I meditate on your precepts (<i>piqqud</i>), and fix my eyes on your ways
16	Buoyantly I delight in your statutes (<i>chuqqah</i>); I will not forget your word (<i>dabar</i>).
17	ג (gimel, g) Crown your servant, that I may live and keep your word (<i>dabar</i>).
18	Clear be my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law (<i>torah</i>).
19	Comfort this sojourner in the earth; hide not your commandments (<i>mitsvah</i>) from me.
20	Consumed is my soul with longing for your rules (<i>mishpat</i>) at all times.
21	Chastener of the insolent, accursed ones, who wander from your commandments (<i>mitsvah</i>).
22	Clear me of scorn and contempt, for I have kept your testimonies (<i>edah</i>).
23	Closeted together, lo , princes plot against me, your servant will think on your statutes (<i>choq</i>).
24	Contentedly I also cling to your testimonies (<i>edah</i>), they are my counselors
25	ד (dalet, d) Deep in the dust lies my soul, give me life according to your word (<i>debar</i>)!
26	Diligently I disclosed my ways , you answered me; teach me your statutes (<i>choq</i>)!
27	Describe the ways of your precepts (<i>piqqud</i>), and I will meditate on your wondrous works.
28	Deadly despair drops my heart; strengthen me according to your word (<i>dabar</i>).
29	Deliver me from every false way and graciously teach me your law (<i>torah</i>)!
30	Determined in the way of faithfulness; I set your rules (<i>mishpat</i>) before me.
31	Don't let me be put to shame; I cling to your testimonies (<i>eduth</i>), O LORD.
32	Daily , I will run in the way of your commandments (<i>mitsvah</i>) when you enlarge my heart.
33	ה (he, h) Expound , O LORD, the way of your statutes (<i>choq</i>); and I will keep it to the end.
34	Enlighten me, that I may keep your law (<i>torah</i>) and observe it with my whole heart.
35	Enable me in the path of your commandments (<i>mitsvah</i>), for I delight in it.
36	Enfold me in empathy for your testimonies (<i>eduth</i>), and not to selfish gain!
37	Eyes have I none for worthless things; and give me life in your ways (<i>derek</i>).
38	Enact your promise (<i>imrah</i>) to your servant, that you may be feared.
39	Ease me of the reproach that I dread, for your rules (<i>mishpat</i>) are good.
40	Earnestly I long for your precepts (<i>piqqud</i>); in your righteousness give me life!

41 **י** (vav, v) **For to me**, O LORD, your steadfast love; your salvation according to your promise (*imrah*)
42 **Fit answer** for him who taunts me, for I trust in your word (*dabar*).
43 **Forsake** not the word of truth **from** my mouth, for my hope is in your rules (*mishpat*).
44 **Forever** and ever, I will **keep** your law (*torah*) continually.
45 **Following** your precepts (*piqqud*), I shall **walk** in a wide place.
46 **Fearlessly**, I will **speak** of your testimonies (*edah*) before kings and shall not be put to shame.
47 **Fountains of joy** in find in your commandments (*mitsvah*), which I love.
48 **Flung wide**, I lovingly **lift** arms to your commands (*mitzvah*) & meditate on your statutes (*choq*).
49 **ז** (zayin, z) **Go not back** on your word (*dabar*) to your servant, in which you have made me hope.
50 **Good news** in my affliction: your promise (*imrah*) gives me life.
51 **Ground down** by **insolents'** derision, I do not turn away from your law (*torah*)
52 **Golden rules** (*mishpat*) from of old bring me comfort when I **remember** them, O LORD.
53 **Great indignation** grips me because of the wicked, how forsake your law (*torah*).
54 **Gone** into a house of sojourning, your statutes (*choq*) have been my **songs**.
55 **Gratefully** I greet each night, **remembering** your Name, O LORD, keeping your law (*torah*).
56 **Guiding** myself by your precepts (*piqqud*), **this** blessing has fallen to me.
57 **ח** (het, ch) **Heritage**, LORD, I claim no other; I promise to keep your words (*dabar*).
58 **Hear my heartfelt cry** in favor; be gracious to me according to your promise (*imrah*).
59 **Helplessly**, I **looked** at my ways, I turn my feet to your testimonies (*edah*).
60 **Hastening**, I do not delay to keep your commandments (*mitsvah*).
61 **Hateful men** ensnare me with **ords**, I do not forget your law (*torah*).
62 **Happily** I rise at **midnight** to praise you, because of your righteous rules (*mishpat*).
63 **Hospitality** I offer those who fear you, of those who keep your precepts (*piqqud*).
64 **How the earth**, O LORD, is full of your **steadfast love**; teach me your statutes (*choq*).
65 **ט** (tet, t) **In fulfillment** of your word (*dabar*), O LORD, you have dealt **well** with your servant.
66 **Instruct** me in **good** judgment and knowledge, for I believe in your commandments (*mitsvah*).
67 **I went astray** **before** I was afflicted, but now I keep your word (*imrah*).
68 **Indeed**, you are **good** and do good; teach me your statutes (*choq*).
69 **Insolent men** smear me with lies, but with my whole heart I keep your precepts (*piqqud*).
70 **Insensitive**, their heart is like fat, but I delight in your law (*torah*).
71 **It is good** for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes (*choq*).
72 **Incalculable wealth** is insignificant, in **comparison** to the law (*torah*) of your mouth.
73 **י** (yod, y) **Jealous** for your **handiwork**; give me insight that I may learn your commandments (*mitsvah*).
74 **Joy** comes to those who **fear** you and see me; because I have hoped in your word (*dabar*).
75 **Just** are your rules (*mishpat*), O LORD, I know; and that in faithfulness you have afflicted me.
76 **Just** comfort me with your steadfast love, according to your promise (*imrah*) to your servant.
77 **Judge me no more**; with mercy, may I live; for your law (*torah*) is my delight.
78 **Just** be the proud's **fall**, they falsely wronged me; I will meditate on your precepts (*piqqud*).
79 **Joined** to my company be those who fear you, that they may know your testimonies (*edah*).
80 **Jealously let my heart** be blameless in your statutes (*choq*), that I may not be put to shame!
81 **כ** (kaf, k) **Keeping watch** for your salvation; I hope in your word (*dabar*).
82 **Keeping watch** for your promise (*imrah*); I ask, "When will you comfort me?"
83 **Kitchen-smoke** shrivels the wine-skin [**that**]; yet I have not forgotten your statutes (*choq*).
84 **Knowest how** long I must endure? When will you judge (*mishpat*) those who persecute me?
85 **Knaves** have **dug** pitfalls for me; they do not live according to your law (*torah*).
86 **Knaves** persecute me with falsehood; help me! **All** your commandments (*mitsvah*) are sure.
87 **Kick** me from the earth **they tried**, but I have not forsaken your precepts (*piqqud*).
88 **Keep** giving me **steadfast love** and life, that I may keep the testimonies (*eduth*) of your mouth.
89 **ל** (lamed, l) **Lord**, your word (*dabar*) is firmly fixed in the heavens **forever**.
90 **Loyal** to your promise to all generations; you have established the earth, and it stands fast.
91 **Lasting by your ordinances** (*mishpat*), for all things are your servants.
92 **Lest** your law (*torah*) had been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction.
93 **Life** I have been given by you through your precepts (*piqqud*) that I will **never forget**.

94 **Lend me** your aid, for I have sought your precepts (*piqqud*).

95 **Laying in** wait the wicked seek to destroy me, but I consider your testimonies (*edah*).

96 **Look where** I may, perfection is limited, your commandment (*mitsvah*) is exceedingly broad.

97 **Mem** (*mem, m*) **My delight** is in your law (*torah*)! It is my meditation all the day.

98 **Musing** on your commands (*mitsvah*) makes me wiser than my **enemies**, it is ever with me.

99 **More insight** have I than **all my teachers**, for your testimonies (*eduth*) are my meditation.

100 **More understanding** than the aged, for I keep your precepts (*piqqud*).

101 **Mindful of every** evil way, I hold back my feet in order to keep your word (*dabar*).

102 **Meek** under your teaching, I do not turn aside from your **rules** (*mishpat*).

103 **Most appetizing** are your words (*imrah*) to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth.

104 **Made wise by your precepts** (*piqqud*), I hate every false way.

105 **Nun** (*nun, n*) **No lamp** like your word (*dabar*) to guide my feet, to light up my path.

106 **Never** will I retract **my oath**, I say it again: to keep your righteous rules (*mishpat*).

107 **Nothing**, LORD, but **affliction**; give me life according to your word (*dabar*).

108 **Nay** LORD, accept my **freewill offerings** of praise, and teach me your rules (*mishpat*).

109 **Now** my **life** is in my hands continually, but I do not forget your law (*torah*).

110 **Nestling** their snares, the wicked **set** them for me, I do not stray from your precepts (*piqqud*).

111 **Now** and forever your testimonies (*eduth*) are my **heritage**, for they are the joy of my heart.

112 **Now** and forever I **incline** my heart to perform your statutes (*choq*), to the end.

113 **Samech** (*samech, s*) **Oh** how I hate the **double-minded**, but I love your law (*torah*).

114 **Other hiding place**, other shield have I none; I hope in your word (*dabar*).

115 **Out of my path**, you evildoers, that I may keep the commandments (*mitsvah*) of my God.

116 **Only** let your promises (*imrah*) **uphold** and keep me; do not let me be ashamed of my hope!

117 **Only hold me** up, that I may be safe and have regard for your statutes (*choq*) always!

118 **Obeying** not your statutes (*choq*), you **spurn** them all, for their cunning is in vain.

119 **Outcasts** become the wicked of the earth, therefore I love your testimonies (*edah*).

120 **Overcome**, my flesh **trembles** for fear of you, and I am afraid of your judgments (*mishpat*).

121 **Ayin** (*ayin, '*) **Performed**, have I, justice (*mishpat*) and righteousness; do not leave me to my oppressors.

122 **Pledge** yourself to do your servant good; let not the insolent oppress me.

123 **Pining** for your salvation my **eyes** fail, for the fulfillment of your righteous promise (*imrah*).

124 **Pity** your servant with your steadfast love, and teach me your statutes (*choq*).

125 **Passionate servant** of you, give me understanding, that I may know your testimonies (*edah*).

126 **Put off the hour** LORD, no more; for your law (*torah*) has been broken.

127 **Precious** above gold, above fine gold, are your commandments (*mitsvah*) which I **thus** love.

128 **Precepts** (*piqqud*)? I **therefore** consider them to be right; I hate every false way.

129 **Pey** (*pey, p*) **Quite wonderful** are your testimonies (*eduth*); therefore my soul keeps them.

130 **Quality** understanding is imparted to the simple, when your words (*dabar*) **unfold** light.

131 **Quivering**, I open my **mouth** and pant, because I long for your commandments (*mitsvah*).

132 **Quickly, turn to me**, be gracious to me, as you do (*mishpat*) with those who love your Name.

133 **Quaking?** Keep my **steps** steady according to your promise (*imrah*), let no iniquity gain hold.

134 **Quell** man's oppression by **redeeming** me, that I may keep your precepts (*piqqud*).

135 **Quietly** shine your **face** upon your servant, and teach me your statutes (*choq*).

136 **Quarreling** against your law (*torah*), people bring **streams** of tears to my eyes.

137 **Tsade** (*tsade, ts*) **Righteous** are you, O LORD, and right are your rules (*mishpat*).

138 **Righteousness** and all faithfulness were how you **appointed** your testimonies (*edah*)

139 **Righteous zeal consumes** me, because my foes forget your words (*dabar*).

140 **Regarding** your promise (*imrah*), it is well **refined**, and your servant loves it.

141 **Reaffirming** your precepts (*piqqud*) I am, though I am **small** and despised.

142 **Righteousness** of yours is righteous forever, and your law (*torah*) is true.

143 **Remembering** me are **trouble** and anguish, but your commandments (*mitsvah*) are my delight.

144 **Righteous** forever are your testimonies (*eduth*); give me understanding that I may live.

145 **Qof** (*qof, q*) **Soul, mind, and heart cry** out, O LORD! I will keep your statutes (*choq*).

146 **Save** me, I **call** to you, that I may observe your testimonies (*edah*).

147 **Springing up** before dawn and crying for help; I hope in your words (*dabar*).

148 **Sleepless nights**, I **confront** the watches of the night, I meditate on your promise (*imrah*).

149 **Steadfast love**, LORD, answer my **voice** with this, by your justice (*mishpat*) give me life.

150 **Seeking** to persecute me with evil purpose they draw near; they are far from your law (*torah*).

151 **So** you are **near**, O LORD, and all your commandments (*mitsvah*) are true.

152 **Schooling** from your testimonies (*edah*), I have **long known** you founded them forever.

153 ר (resh, r) **Timelessly** remember your law (*torah*), **look** on my affliction and deliver me.

154 **Till** redemption comes, **plead** my cause; give me life according to your promise (*imrah*).

155 **They** do not seek your statutes (*choq*), salvation is **far** from the wicked.

156 **Treasuring** your **mercy**, O LORD; give me life according to your rules (*mishpat*).

157 **Testimonies** (*eduth*)! No swerving from them, yet many are my persecutors and adversaries.

158 **Transparently** I **look upon** the faithless with disgust, they do not keep your commands (*imrah*).

159 **To** your steadfast love, give me life; **see** how I love your precepts (*piqqud*)!

160 **The sum** of your word (*dabar*) is truth, all of your righteous rules (*mishpat*) endure forever.

161 ש (shin, sh) **Unscrupulous princes** persecute me unjustly, but my heart is in awe of your words (*dabar*).

162 **Uncovering** great spoil is the **rejoicing** at your word (*imrah*).

163 **Understand**, I hate and abhor **falsehood**, but I love your law (*torah*).

164 **Unwavering**, **seven** times a day I praise you for your righteous rules (*mishpat*).

165 **Unsurpassed** peace have those who love your law (*torah*); nothing can make them stumble.

166 **Unfailingly**, I **wait** for your salvation, O LORD, and I do your commandments (*mitsvah*).

167 **Unswervingly**, my soul **keeps** your testimonies (*edah*); I love them exceedingly.

168 **Urgently**, I **keep** your precepts (*piqqud*) & testimonies (*edah*), for all my ways are before you.

169 נ (tav, t) **Verily**, let my cry **approach** you, O LORD; give me understanding by your word (*dabar*).

170 **Verify** my plea **before** you; deliver me according to your word (*imrah*).

171 **Visibly** my lips **pour forth** praise, for you teach me your statutes (*choq*).

172 **Voice!** **Sing** of his word (*imrah*), for all his commandments (*mitsvah*) are right.

173 **Validate** me with your **helping hand**, for I have chosen your precepts (*piqqud*).

174 **Victory** will be your salvation, O LORD, and your law (*torah*) is my delight.

175 **Vivify my soul** so that it will praise you, and let your rules (*mishpat*) help me.

176 **Veering astray** like a lost sheep; seek your servant, I do not forget your commands (*mitsvah*).

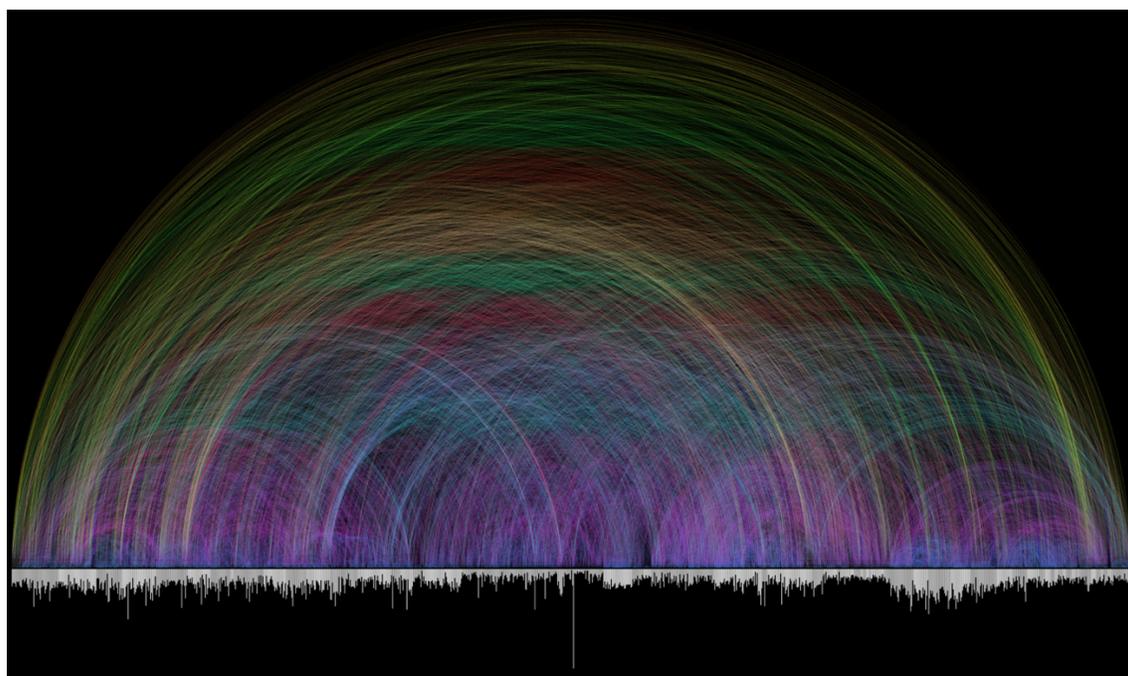
Psalm 119¹

Centerpiece, Masterpiece

AROUND TEN YEARS AGO, someone created one of the most stunning biblical images ever. It isn't a painting, not a picture. It isn't even really all that beautiful to look at,

¹ **Bold** = the first word in the Hebrew. I have also given the Hebrew word for the main “law” synonym of each verse, though, as I did it I added a couple of words that most scholars do not consider part of “The Elite Eight,” which we will discuss in the sermon. For more on my translation thoughts, see n. 5 below.

though it kind of is. This piece of art was made by a computer programmer and number-nerd named **Chris Harrison**. It is an arcing visualization of every cross-reference in the Bible. For example, if there is a NT verse from the OT, it received an arc from one chapter to the other. If something in the Psalms went back to Exodus, same thing. I'm not sure we will ever know the full extent of all cross-references. Nevertheless, what makes the graphic so stunning is its complexity. He mapped 63,779 of them, creating a file that is over 100mb. The result is a rainbow-like kaleidoscope of colors moving between every book of the Bible.



CHRIS HARRISON, BIBLE CROSS-REFERENCES, 2007.

[HTTP://WWW.CHRISHARRISON.NET/INDEX.PHP/VISUALIZATIONS/BIBLEVIZ](http://www.chrisharrison.net/index.php/visualizations/bibleviz)

I'm not actually today interested in anything except the long line at the bottom of the picture. Each line at the bottom represents the length of each chapter in the Bible. The long line in the middle is Psalm 119. Notice where it is located. It is for all intents and purposes, [the Centerpiece of the Bible](#).² Given its length, we might also call it [the Masterpiece](#). It is certainly extremely complex and has given scholar no end of fits. All this is simply to say, this is obviously a very, very important song.³

Our Confession says something that summarizes its importance, though it does not site this song in its proofs. It says that *“The Holy Scripture is the only sufficient, certain, and infallible rule of all saving knowledge, faith and obedience”* (LBC 1.1). And again, *“The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man’s salvation, faith, and life”* is *“expressly set down or necessarily contained in the Holy Scripture”* (1.6). To paraphrase Micah, *He has told you, O man, what is good and what the LORD requires of you. But to do justly, and to*

² In a very unscientific analysis, I took the picture, doubled it, put it in *Mac Pages*, and cut the picture in half each direction (*Pages* has the ability to automatically stop right at the half-way point). What did I find? Walla! Psalm 119 is smack dab in the middle. Now, Psalm 117 or 118 are sometimes said to be the literal center. In terms of chapters, 118 would be the center, but of course, only of the Protestant Bible and the way it is arranged. In terms of verses, this is not something that can be known with certainty, nor does it matter, given that the verses were added after the fact.

³ We could say the same thing about Psalm 117, as it is the shortest chapter in the Bible. We may even say the same thing about Psalm 118, given how much of it is quoted in the NT.

love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God (Micah 6:8). These things hit at the heart of Psalm 119's message. This is what the song is all about.

This in turn hits at something that is immanently vital, the usefulness and sufficiency of Scripture to our lives. But how do you impress this greatest of needs upon a person, so that it becomes something that *they internalize*? For far too many people, they never do. Getting the Scripture into their own hearts because it is completely sufficient for living godly, faith-filled lives remains ever beyond them. So, they spend their years, like junkies, always trying to find a fix that will satisfy. Not understanding that they have everything they need right in front of them.

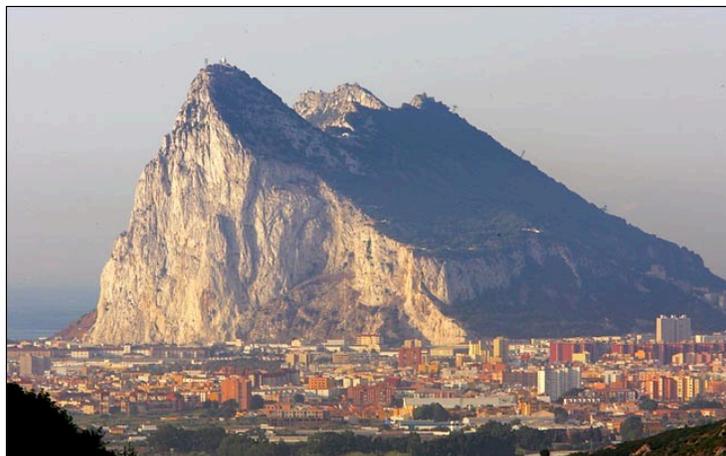
I was thinking of some questions that might get at *your need* to at least ask yourself this question. Do you ever get frustrated in your life with circumstances that are beyond your control: wicked governments, mean kids, cruel bosses or neighbors? Do you ever seek in your prayers a kind of magic pill that God will give you to take away temptation? "*Lord, please don't let me fall into that one again,*" with no real responsibility on your own part to do anything about it? Do you find yourself frustrated at your spiritual walk because of your own sins or the sins of others? Is there a single person

who doesn't have trouble with at least something along these lines at least some of the time?

What's the solution? Ignore? Get angry? Get depressed? Blame other people? Build up your self-esteem with New Age books? No, the solution is Psalm 119.

Some background to Psalm 119

What can you say about Ps 119? Probably a whole lot! I've been asked how many weeks I'm going to take to go through it. Before answering, let me ask why people ask this? The answer? Because this is obviously a *long* song. In fact, its **176 verses** more than double the next longest song in the Bible. They also total more than the whole next set of songs: **The Songs of Ascent (120-134)**. It dominates Book V of the Psalter like the rock dominates Gibraltar.



In some ways, it is overwhelming. Part of this is the length. But part of it is the repetition and our inability to deal well with it. In fact, the repetition can become **monotonous**. Like reading the laws of Leviticus, we can easily lose our attention. Someone has written, “**In this century, biblical poetry tends to be valued for its powerful images, provocative turns of phrases, or powerful emotional statements.**”⁴ But this is not Milton or Poe or Burns or Fogelberg. And because of it, many of us are not patient enough to “get it.”

Stop for a moment and think on that. I believe **that’s actually part of the point of its length!** This song and its message are really only for those who want it badly enough. It’s like Jesus, who sent the crowds away after he fed them, because they just weren’t interested in his message. But for the disciples ... **Where else would we go? “You have the words of Eternal life” (John 6:68).**

Why would I say this? For example, **eight times** (in the ESV), the word “**meditate**” is used in Psalm 119. What does it mean to **meditate**? When you are listening to music on the ride home, are you meditating on it? Doubtful. When you

⁴ **David Noel Freedman**, *Psalms 119: The Exaltation of Torah*, Biblical and Judaic Studies Volume 6 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns: 1999) 87.

have the news on in the background while you work, are you meditating? Probably not on the radio! Does that which you are to meditate upon impress itself upon you immediately, or does it need to be mediated ... by **time** and **focus** and **energy** and **patience**? The question is rhetorical. Meditation demands all of these. It is the opposite of a microwave-meal or a fast-food drive-thru. You simply can't receive it and eat it all in five minutes. Imagine how long it took to compose this thing. Don't therefore assume you should just "get it" in the time it takes you to skim it with your morning coffee. The length serves as a barrier to all, save those who want it the most badly.

Now, there's something about Psalm 119 that I believe could actually help some of us overcome this monotonous barrier as English speakers, but unfortunately is almost always missing. It involves **translation**. Our English translations may actually inadvertently contribute in a negative way to this already imposing wall of text. I've been able to find only two translations even attempting to address it.⁵ Allow me to tell you about it by reading some of my solution to it from **Psalm 119:1-8** as I would like to see it:

⁵ The first is the **Knox Bible** of 1949 (the OT), which is a translation of the Latin Vulgate in light of Hebrew and Greek originals. The second is **Brenda H. Boerger** translation in her article, "Extending Translation Principles for Poetry and Biblical Acrostics," *Notes on Translation* 11.2

Ah, blessed are those whose way is blameless, who
walk in the law of the LORD!

Also, blessed are they who keep his testimonies,
seeking him with their whole heart,

Always do no wrong, but walk in his ways!

Above all, you have commanded your precepts to be
kept diligently.

Aye, that my ways may be steadfast in keeping your
statutes!

At that time I shall not be ashamed, my eyes fixed on
all your commandments.

(1997): 36 [35-56]. I have attempted the third, which I have provided for you at the beginning of the sermon.

A note about my translation in light of these other two. This was a LOT of work. I've been wanting to try it, to see if I could do it. But more, I found it very helpful to do exactly what the poem tells me to do. [Meditate!](#) It was well worth it. Thankfully, I had these other two versions to aid me when I couldn't think of any words. Now, her translation breaks from the letter-order of the Hebrew letters at [vs. 76](#). This is because she wanted a poem that went through all 26 letters of *our* alphabet, rather than the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. I believe there is great merit to this on the devotional level, though it is not very helpful for a study of the psalm, because it is too periphrastic and interpretive to help us see much of the original text. But because it is so beautiful and original (indeed, it is a piece of art in its own right, I can't imagine how long it took her to do this!), I have provided a copy of it at the end of the sermon. The Knox Bible skips the letter "Q," apparently because it was too difficult to attempt. So, at some point, I was totally on my own. It was not as literal as I wanted for our purposes, and it has older language and is a Latin translation. You can find it online for free.

In my translation, I continued what I've been trying to do in the other acrostic psalms. I used the ESV as much as I could (it was my base text), while still being faithful to the first idea of getting the first letter right. Sometimes, I had to switch the order of the verse (each verse is broken into two halves). Sometimes, I shortened it more than I wanted to, because I wanted to have only one line of text for each verse in the font and margin size I've been using. (It would be fun sometime to make sure that each Hebrew word for "law" is translated consistently, which I know the ESV does not do).

An upright heart will praise you, when I learn your
righteous rules.

As I keep your statutes; do not utterly forsake me!

Does that **do anything unusual** to you that you don't
find reading it in one of your Bibles? Does it work on you
differently? Perhaps you didn't catch it. Let's try some more.
Here are the next four verses:

Best way to keep a young man pure? By guarding it
according to your word.

Be thou the quest of my whole heart; let me not
wander from your commandments.

Buried deep in my heart, your word shall keep me
from sinning against you.

Blessed are you, O LORD; teach me your statutes!

Still didn't hear it? Here is the very end of the poem as
someone else has rendered it:

Zealous One, your standards are the zenith of my days,
Zestfully I exalt you. I'm alive!

Zigzagging and dizzy, I walk in a daze.

Shepherd, show me your ways!

Zealously I make your rules my prize.⁶

⁶ This is the last bit of Boerger's translation.

I'm sure you heard it by now. Psalm 119 is **an acrostic poem**. Now, many of you knew this. Indeed, this Psalm is the only acrostic psalm that you actually have the Hebrew letters inserted by your English Bibles before each section. But that's not exactly within reach of most people who still have no idea what the point of that is. This kind of a translation makes that imminently identifiable, and hopefully, eye-catching enough to make you want to keep reading.

Let's try to understand this better. Notice that you find these markers **every eight verses**. This is not an accident. As you heard when I did the "A's," the first eight verses are the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, the second eight are the second letter, and so on, right on through to the 22nd and last letter. This is why there are 176 verses (176 verses divided by 22 letters = 8). Unlike many of the other acrostics in the Psalms, this one has not one line, but eight in a row with the same letter. And unlike many of them, this one is completely unbroken. Every single line begins with the appropriate letter. This has been perfectly preserved for us.

What is the point of this acrostic? Well, like the others, it helps you see a **totality**. But this song is unlike all others, for it multiplies that totality by 8! Eight times you have each

letter impressed upon you until you get to the end. Sometime this week, take the version I have provided for you at the end of the sermon and just read it, or better yet, read it aloud. I promise, it will affect you in a way you can't get by reading any other version.

But the **totality of what**? This is where we need to come to **the content** and even the **wider context** of Psalm 119. First, *the situation of the Psalmist*. He is afflicted (vv. 67, 71, 75). He and other like-minded God-fearers have tension with those in authority who persecute them (the proud, wicked, evil-doers). And, there is a king (46). It is possible that it could be a king of Israel in the days of apostasy. It is more likely that it is one of the kings of Persia and the suffering is taking place at the hands of wicked men (either Gentile or Jew) there.

Thinking about these things with the Psalmist is one thing; but thinking about them regarding Christ is another. Indeed, as has been the case with many of the immediately prior songs, Christ as the Singer of Psalm 119 is vitally important to see. How would I know that? You mean besides the fact that Jesus taught me that this is how I'm supposed to read the OT? Vern Poythress puts it this way,

Who, may we ask, is the “I” of Ps. 119? We claim that the “I” is Christ (not, to be sure, as an isolated individual, but as head of his people). Even a casual reading of the psalm should prove that no one can rightly say these words who has not kept the whole law with his whole heart (119:14, 20, 22, 56, 60–63, 97–104, etc.). Moreover, the psalmist says, “The Lord is my portion” (v. 57), words parallel to Ps 16:5. And of Psalm 16 Peter says that David, in writing it, “foresaw and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ”, i.e. David wrote Ps 16 first of all about Christ and not about himself (Acts 2:29–31). Therefore, we think that it is not going too far to say that Ps 119 was also written in view of Christ. Any believer can take the “I” on his lips only because he is in Christ. Therefore, in particular, it is Christ who says, “Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage.”⁷

If you don't have this understanding, then reading Psalm 119 will tend to lead you toward either **despair** or **pride**. Despair because you know you can't do the things here perfectly, but you think that's its point. Pride because you fool yourself that you can. Beloved, you can't! Not the way he does. Nevertheless, as a Christian you can sing it *because you are hidden “in Christ” who has done Psalm 119 perfectly*. This

⁷ Vern S. Poythress, “Ezra 3, Union with Christ, and Exclusive Psalmody,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 37, no. 1 (1974): 89.

frees you to sing it with him, knowing that God has given you new desires as he conforms you into the image of Christ, and knowing that you are not justified on the basis of your own love and obedience to the Law, but His.

Second, *the possible setting of the song* is intriguing. We have just come out of a series of songs that were sung during **Passover**. The feast theme does not suddenly quit now. As someone has put it, “**From biblical times Israel had a festival to celebrate the giving of the Law on Sinai, the feast of Pentecost; and it is Pentecost that offers the most plausible setting for Psalm 119.**”⁸ If this is true, then when we think of our Lord ascending to heaven, our thoughts ought to turn at some point to Psalm 119. Indeed, this is what he himself does in his very last verse in Matthew’s Gospel. This is literally the Great Commission: “**Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you**” (**Matt 28:20**). This is exactly what Psalm 119 is about.

It is a prayer addressed to God. Other than the first three verses, the entire song is addressed to God. Its purpose seems to be intended on one hand **to instruct** and on the other **to evoke love for the God** who has revealed himself in every

⁸ **Goulder**, *The Psalms of the Return (Book V, Psalms 107-150)*, 201. This quote and most of this background information are all found in Goulder’s section on Psalm 119, pp. 199-209.

word of Scripture. How does this happen? How do we learn to obey God? How do we learn to have greater affection for him? By **meditating** on his word.

I can't make you meditate on it in your own free time. But I do have the ability to help you think about it for these next few minutes. So, to finally answer the question, yes, I am going to preach such a thing all at once. Why? Because this is a song, and it is meant to be internalized all at once—or at least—in one day. What do I mean? Let's return to the idea of *how long this song is* for a moment.

Curiously, someone has suggested that the song has **eight natural divisions that correspond to the way Israel counted their day**. They broke their day into eight parts:

- **Evening** (the day for a Jew began at evening, not morning)
- **Late**
- **Midnight**
- **Cockcrow**
- **Dawn**
- **Third Hour**
- **Sixth Hour** (noon)
- **Ninth Hour**

Importantly, we've already seen "eight" in this song ("meditate" appears eight times in the ESV). In fact, **eight is its key number**. There are **eight main words** that are used to describe that which we are to meditate upon and love:

- *torah* (translated as "law" in the ESV, see vs. 1)
- *imrah* (word, vs. 11. In other translations sometimes "promise")
- *debar* (word, 9)
- *choqim* (statutes, 5)
- *mitzvah* (commandments, 6)
- *mishpat* (rules, 7)
- *edah* (testimonies, 2)
- *piqqud* (precepts, 4).⁹

One (or sometimes two) of these words are found in virtually every verse of the song.¹⁰ Most scholars do not believe these are finely tuned technical words that each give their own different take. Rather, they are **synonyms**.¹¹ In

⁹ While *torah* is consistently translated as "law" in the ESV, some of the others are not consistently translated. I would have liked to have had the time to go through my translation and make them consistent.

¹⁰ For an exhaustive study of the frequency and purpose of these words in the psalm see **Freedman**, *Psalm 119 and the Exaltation of Torah*.

¹¹ "In keeping with the eight-line stanza, the poet has chosen eight keywords, beginning with torah (primus inter pares as shown by the varying frequencies) and supplemented by seven others, all roughly synonymous or sharing an extended semantic field." (**Freedman**, 78, see also 32).

other words, don't try to make too much of their difference. This is a poem. You might be tempted to think that what they point at is only "law" or "commandment." However, when you put them all together, they really equate to **the totality of God's Holy Word**, which includes his *testimonies* about himself and his *promises* in the Gospel.¹²

Returning to the length, there are **many references to parts of the day** in Psalm 119. Here's where things get very interesting and this is actually the root of my idea for how to preach this beast in one setting. If you read the first three letters (24 verses) as being read, recited, and meditated upon during the evening, and continue on from there, you get some very interesting correspondences with the placement of the "time" language in the song (see chart below). A **key verse** in this regard is **vs. 164** where the Psalmist says, "**Seven times a day I praise you.**" This comes at the end of the

¹² For example, Poythress writes, "Finally, we may ask what is the range of 'statute.' Just what parts of Scripture are statutes? In Ps. 119 'statutes' (חקים), 'ordinances' (משפטים), 'commandments' (מצוות), 'precepts' (פקדים), 'word' (אמרה), 'law' (תורה), 'testimonies' (עדות) occur almost in free variation with each other. The psalmist wants to say everything laudatory that he can about all God's word, especially its legal parts. Hence, for doctrinal purposes, it is not wrong to apply almost any statement of Ps. 119 to any legal part of Scripture, or perhaps even to absolutely all Scripture. The word אמרה, for example, is general enough to cover all words of God, and תורה is used of the whole law of Moses (apparently including the *nonlegal* portion of the Pentateuch: Josh 1:7-8, 2 Kgs. 14:6, etc.). In short, there seems to be every reason for saying, on the basis of Ps. 119:54, that Christ could sing the whole of Scripture in "the house of his pilgrimage." Vern S. Poythress, 90. Poythress lists seven synonyms, but it is better to see **eight** (as said above. See **Freedman**, 30-38).

seventh of the eight parts of the song. This is a reflection upon how he has thus far mediated at the various stages of the day upon the corresponding parts of the song! In this way, the song teaches meditation “**round the clock.**”¹³ This is what makes this incredibly long song “singable.” Rather than sit down at one time and sing 176 verses, you break it up into the eight parts of the Jewish day.

Time of Day	Part of Day	Stanza	Verse	Temporal References
Evening	1	1-3	1-24	
Late	2	4-6	25-48	
Midnight	3	7-9	49-72	See vv. 55, 62
Cockcrow	4 th watch	10-12	73-96	See vv. 82-84 “eyes failing”
Dawn	5	13-15	97-120	See vv. 97 and 105 “day” and “light”
Third hour	6	16-18	121-44	
Sixth hour (noon)	7	19-21	145-68	See vs. 148 and 164 is a looking back on the seven
Ninth hour	8	22	169-76	Conclusion and a series of prayers for the future

All this leads me to think about the meaning of the number 8. Eight, of course, is part-and-parcel of music. We call it the **octave** (do, re, mi, fa, so, la, te, do). Obviously, Psalm 119 is a *song*. We’ve seen “the eighth” as a heading to some of the earlier songs of David. All the Fathers saw those songs as **prophecies of the Resurrection**, because eight, symbolizing newness, particularly the newness of the “first

¹³ See the discussion in Goulder, 201-03.

day” of the week, is the very moment Christ was raised from the dead.¹⁴

But this leads to a thought about Psalm 119s *place in the Psalter* itself. Within Book V, it forms the second of five units of thought which seem to flow quite naturally: Steadfast Love, **Torah**, Zion, the King, and Hallelujah! (see the chart in the sermon on Psalm 107). **Because of God’s steadfast love Torah makes.** But Torah in turn anticipates the coming of the King to Zion, Praise the Lord!

Also, Psalm 119 has great affinities to Psalm 19. More than half of the shorter song appears in the longer one.

Psalm 119	Psalm 19
Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the LORD! Blessed are those who keep his testimonies , who seek him with their whole heart, who also do no wrong, but walk in his ways! You have commanded your precepts to be kept diligently. Oh that my ways may be steadfast in keeping your statutes !	The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether." (7-9)

¹⁴ **Going Deeper:** The theme of “eight” goes even further. In the LXX there are eight acrostic psalms (9/10, 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119, 145). In his exhaustive study of Psalm 19, **Freedman** suggests for various reasons that we can take the seven besides 119 as a group (p. 22-23). Taken together, the eight “**reflect the two great activities of God: the creation in eight stages or works, and the Torah or the Word, recorded in the Bible and expressed in the alphabetic psalms. The Great Psalm, revolving around the number eight, is a celebration of the Torah (and its seven sister and brother key-words [this refers to the four masculine and four feminine synonyms of the psalm]), while the seven lesser psalms celebrate the whole gamut of divine activity and presence in his universe.**” (p. 23).

Then I shall not be put to shame, having my eyes fixed on all your <u>commandments</u> . I will praise you with an upright heart, when I learn your righteous <u>rules</u> . I will keep your statutes; do not utterly forsake me!" (1-8)	
The unfolding of your words gives light; it <u>imparts understanding to the simple</u> . (130)	the <u>testimony</u> of the LORD is sure, <u>making wise the simple</u> (7)
Your word is a lamp to my feet and a <u>light to my path</u> . (105)	the commandment of the LORD is pure, <u>enlightening the eyes;</u> " (8)
Therefore I love your commandments <u>above gold, above fine gold</u> . (127)	<u>More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold;</u> (10)
How sweet are your words to my taste, <u>sweeter than honey to my mouth!</u> (103)	<u>sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb</u> . (10)
Keep steady my steps according to your promise, and <u>let no iniquity get dominion over me</u> . (133)	Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins; <u>let them not have dominion over me!</u> (13)

Psalm 119 has also been called the great exposition on Psalm 1. “His delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night” (Ps 1:2). We’ve just seen how this is exactly what Psalm 119 does!

What’s important to understand is that Psalm 1 connects to Psalm 2 as they seem to form a kind of chiasm which begins and ends with “The man” (Christ). Similarly, scholars have demonstrated similarities between Psalm 18 and 118, which of course come before 19 and 119.¹⁵ Why does this

¹⁵ **Goulder** (208) points out that Psalms 116, 117, and 118 all have direct ties to Psalm 18. 116, “The cords of death encompassed me, and the pains of Sheol...” 117, the summoning of the nations to praise Yahweh. 118, “He brought me forth also into a large place.” So also does Psalm 119. “For I have kept the ways of the LORD, and have not wickedly departed from my God. For all his judgments were before me, and I put not away his statutes from me. I was also perfect with him, and I kept myself from my iniquity” (18:23-25) = “I have chosen the way of faithfulness: Your judgments have I set [before me]” (119:30) or “I have not turned aside from your judgments; for you have taught me” (102).

matter? Because in 18 and 118 you have a great victory over death being followed immediately by reflections on the law. Again, it is easy to see the application to the Christian. God has brought us from death to life, not so that we can live in whatever way pleases us, but so that we can live in a way that is pleasing to God. In being made alive, we are not given the ability to please God because we now love his word and treasure it in our hearts.

The placement of the song, the length of the song, the key number of the song, all of these have pointed us to the resurrection. How interesting that today is Easter! As we now look at it, I'm going to break it down into these eight sections while using the entire last day of Jesus' life as a backdrop, which I find completely fascinating.



“A-C” (א, ב, ג)

119:1-8 – Evening (3:00 pm ... Reclining with Friends)

Someone else has said, “The book of Psalms features three great Torah psalms: Pss 1, 19, and 119. Each one of these psalms is coupled with a royal or ‘messianic’ psalm (Pss 2, 18, and 118) (Mays 1987). Ps 1 focuses on the Torah as the source of wisdom and blessing. Ps 19 compares the Torah with natural revelation and concludes that the pleasures of the Torah alone are better than the pleasures of sin.” Michael B Shepherd, “Hebrew Acrostic Poems and Their Vocabulary Stock,” *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 36, no. 2 (2010): 102.

As we can see from the very first verse, Psalm 119 is a celebration of the Law of Yahweh. “Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the LORD!” (Ps 119:1). “Law” is the word “*torah*,” and like Psalm 1 and 19, it is the starting point of the song. Our eight words are found in vv. 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, and 11.

The very first words of the “A” section are alike: “blessed” and “blessed” in vv. 1 and 2. Happy! This reflects Psalm 1. And it reminds us of the Beatitudes.

Happy why? Let me give you the six synonyms from this “A” section that explain it. Happy because in [1] *torah* (law), we walk and are blameless (1). In seeking [2] *edah* (testimonies) with our whole heart, we are blessed (2). In walking in his ways, we do no wrong (3). What man or woman will have a guilty conscience if they do no wrong? Obedience results in a happy inner life, because God himself is pleased. Thus, “I shall not be ashamed” when I fix my eyes on the [3] *mitzvah* (commandments; 6). God has commanded his [4] *piqqud* (precepts) to be kept (4); and his desire is to be steadfast in keeping the [5] *choq* (statutes; 5). Do you hear the parallel there? Keeping! When you learn the [6] *mishpat* (rules) that are righteous, your heart begins to praise and rejoice (7).

The “Bs” begin with that basic teaching that is beknownst to so many: “Best way to keep a young man’s way pure? By guarding it according to your [7] *debar*” (**word**; 9). My grandmother wrote this in my *Thompson Chain Reference Bible* she bought me when I was a child and to this day, this particular Bible has been my most used. I’ve had to duct-tape the binding. Notice here that the word “word” is not limited merely to laws and commandments. Rather, it extends it to everything God has spoken to us in the Scripture.

The final synonym [8] is found in vs. 11 and it shows the necessity of making Psalm 119 your own. “I have stored up your *imrah* (**word/Promise**) in my heart, that I might not sin against you” (11). You want to know how to know God’s will? Read his word and then obey it. Bury it in your heart and you will be happy. Seeking the LORD with your whole heart and fix your eyes upon his commandments, or as vs. 14 puts it, “delight” in the way of his testimonies more than in the riches of the earth.

The “Cs” commence with a request for the LORD to crown him. But not so that he can make cash or be celebrated. Rather, it is so that he may live to keep God’s word (17). He needs open eyes to see the wonders of the law

(18). He needs to be consumed in his soul with longing for God's rules at all times (20) and to cling to his testimonies as his counselors (24).

Now, if it is true that this first section of the song was the first meditation of the day, that would put it at what they call "evening." That last day of Jesus' life began at this time, and we have been thinking much about it these past few psalms. "When it was evening, he reclined at table with the twelve" (Matt 26:20). Of course, we have no reason to think he was singing Psalm 119 at that time. But Jesus was preparing his Disciples for the events that would soon follow. And what we will find with them in conjunction with the teaching of Psalm 119 is not good. But for now, the evening is a mostly wonderful affair. The disciples are happy and blessed. Jesus is celebrating a new covenant meal with them, and that, of course, is rooted in someone keeping perfectly the Law of God or as vs. 3 puts it, "who also do no wrong." Still, the warnings are there for them. "Let me not wander from your commandments" (10). Meanwhile, my mind can't help but wonder if in the back of his mind Jesus wasn't already thinking of something like vs. 23, "Even though princes sit plotting against me, your servant will meditate on your statutes."

“D-F” (1, 7, 7) Psalm 119:25-48 – Late (And the Garden of Gethsemane)

The “Ds” deal with a soul near death, but much desirous of life according to the word (25). The psalmist’s “ways” (26) are compared with Gods “ways” (27). He is in despair (28) and needs deliverance (29). He is determined to remain faithful (30) and doesn’t want to be put to shame (31). Therefore, the solution in his desperate depression is to focus and meditate on God’s word all the more.

The “Es” expound the need for enlightenment and enablement by God. They are entirely focused on Yahweh’s sovereignty encroaching upon his life so he can make it to the end. The “Fs” effortlessly follow from earlier themes. He doesn’t want to be forsaken by having God’s rules leave him (43). He will keep them forever (44). They bring him fountains of joy (47) so that he flings wide his arms in worship (48).

After the Supper, we read, “Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, ‘Sit here, while I go over there and pray.’ And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful

and troubled. Then he said to them, ‘My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me’” (Matt 26:36-38). This certainly fits the idea that begins this second of the eight sections, as he made his way later that night to the Garden.

But do you remember what happens next? “And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, ‘My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will’” (39). It reminds me of this verse, “My soul melts away for sorrow; strengthen me according to your word!” (Ps 119:28). I also can’t help but think that our Lord knew what was coming like in this verse, “I will also speak of your testimonies before kings and shall not be put to shame” (46).

Then, of course, we read that “he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, ‘So, could you not watch with me one hour?’ Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak’” (40-41). The night watches are exactly when this was sung. As the Psalmist is beginning his long night vigil meditating on *torah* and its life-giving hope in the midst of suffering and distress, the disciples are sleeping. It reminds me of something our Lord told them

earlier, which contrasts so sharply with the singer of Psalm 119. “Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will dress himself for service and have them recline at table, and he will come and serve them. If he comes in the second watch, or in the third, and finds them awake, blessed are those servants!” (Luke 12:37-38).

“G-I” (ט, טז, ז)
Psalm 119:49-72 – Midnight (Still in the Garden of Grief)

The third watch would correspond to the hours between midnight and the cockcrow. This is where we now go as we begin the “Gs.” I can imagine Jesus praying the first verse quite easily. “Go not back on your word to your servant, in which you have made me hope” (49). And the second, “Good news in my affliction; your promise gives me life” (50). Is he thinking ahead in the next verse? “Ground down by insolent derision, I do not turn away from your law” (51). On it goes with comfort from the law (52), but great indignation because of the wicked (53). All this happens at “night” (55), yet he still remembers to keep God’s law.

This happens in the “Hs” as well. “Happily, I rise at midnight to praise you” (62). Even though “Hateful men ensnare me with cords” (61). His heartfelt cry is for the LORD to be gracious according to his promise (58). Through it all, he promises to keep the words (57) and precepts (63), and turn his feet to the testimonies (59).

The “Is” take us to instruction. “Instruct me in good judgment and knowledge, for I believe in your commandments” (66). But look at how it says, “I went astray before I was afflicted” (67). This kind of a verse shows the importance of remembering that this is not merely the words of Christ (who never went astray), but of his people, who often do. Look no further than the disciples. “Again, for the second time, he went away and prayed, ‘My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.’ And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy”

(Matt 26:42-43). All of this happened in the third watch, the midnight hour, when evil lurks. These men knew not the evil that was lurking about, both inside and outside of their own hearts; so they slept. But thank God Jesus kept watch over himself and, lovingly, over his disciples who would soon all turn away from him.

“J-L” (ל, כ, י) Psalm 119:73-96 – Cockcrow (And Peter Wept Bitterly)

Our fourth section joins us to the “Js.” The Psalmist just wants joy. He wants joy for others. “Joy comes to those who fear you and see me; because I have hoped in your word” (74). He wants joy for himself. “In faithfulness you have afflicted me” (75) so “Just comfort me with your steadfast love” (76). Continuing to think about the Lord, we come to a verse that says, “Just be the proud’s fall, they falsely wronged me; I will meditate on your precepts” (78).

As this corresponds to the fourth watch of the night, those wee hours of our early morning, the “Ks” keep us keenly focused. Hence, he keeps watch with his “eyes” on the promise even as he asks, “When will you comfort me?” (82). “How long must our servant endure? When will you judge those who persecute me” (84). This use of *mishpat* (judgement) is fairly unique in this song, in that it doesn’t refer to the judgment-laws of the LORD, but to the just judging of the wicked. “The insolent have dug pitfalls for me; they do not live according to your law ... They persecute me with falsehood; help me!” (85-86). But these

end with **the center verse** of the song, “**In your steadfast love give me life, that I may keep the testimonies of your mouth**” (88). **Life!** It fits the way several recent songs have been at their center too. How good is God that the center verse of this great song deals then with resurrection and life!

The “**Ls**” leave us with the LORD’s leading and with life. His word is firmly fixed in the heavens forever (89). This is the first verse of the second half of the song. He is loyal to his promises (90), and his ordinances are lasting (91). If these things were not true, he would have perished in his affliction (92). Do you see the absolute need of God’s word for the Singer? Without it, he dies. Without it, he cannot get through what he is being brought to endure. With it, he has life which comes through his precepts (93).

Contrast this now with Peter. “**So, leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words again. Then he came to the disciples and said to them, ‘Sleep and take your rest later on. See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners’**” (Matt 26:44-45). What hour was that? It was the hour of the cockcrow. Jesus had told Peter, “**Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times**” (Matt 26:34). And now, as Jesus is being led away to

his greatest trial, Peter finds himself at that same early hour moment denying the LORD. “And Peter remembered the saying of Jesus, ‘Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.’ And he went out and wept bitterly” (Matt 26:75).

“M-O” (ם, ו, ז) Psalm 119:97-120 – Dawn

As he heads out to the morning of his murder, we meander into a well-met resolution regarding the law in the “Ms.” “My delight in your law! It is my meditation all the day” (97). Daylight has broken; he will not turn back now. His musings have made him wiser than his enemies (98). He has more insight than his teachers (99), more understanding than the aged (100). He is mindful of every evil way (101). He has been made wise by the precepts of God, and hates every false way, even if it means he must die to remain faithful (104). This alone will get him through.

The “Ns” begin with that renowned verse, which again hints at the light of day. But now we find a new light, “Your word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path” (108). He entrenches his resolve. “Never will I retract my oath ... to

keep your righteous rules” (106). No matter what comes next, he will not abandon his obedience. Even in the face of nonstop affliction (107): mockings, beatings, whippings. His joy is set before him (111), he will obey the LORD to the end (112).

Nevertheless, the “Os” take us back to the wicked. “Oh, how I hate the double-minded, but I love your law” (113). “Out of my path, you evildoers, that I may keep the commandments of my God” (115). Therefore, he needs the Lord to oversee. “Only let your promises uphold and keep me” (116). “Only hold me up” (117). He knows the fate of the wicked, they become outcasts (119), but his flesh trembles for fear of the LORD (120). God must get him through this great ordeal.

This day has dawned in darkness. But because of his resolution, His trial would come to an end. A new day would soon dawn—the day of Psalm 118. “This is the Day the LORD has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it” (Ps 118:24). “Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb” (Matt 28:1).

“P-R” (פ, ר, צ)

Psalm 119:121-144 – The Third Hour (Mark 15:25; They Crucified Him)

The “Ps” put us in a place to appreciate pure obedience. “Performed, have I, justice and righteousness; do not leave me to my oppressors” (121). As his trial was coming to an end, there was nothing else he could do. He had obeyed faithfully. And now, all there was left to do was, in the words of that old folk song, *walk that lonesome valley*. In that third hour of the morning (about 9:00am), “Pining for your salvation my eyes fail” (123). He’s been up all night. “Pity your servant with your steadfast love” (124), but “Put off the hour LORD, no more; for your law has been broken” (126). “And it was the third hour when they crucified him” (Mark 15:25).

The “Qs” continue to have us quietly contemplate. What would make a man do that kind of thing? “Quite wonderful are your testimonies; therefore my soul keeps them” (129). “Quivering, I open my mouth and pant, because I long for your commandments” (131). “Quell man’s oppression by redeeming me” (134). It is now midmorning. So, like the sun, “Quietly shine your face

upon your servant” (135). Yet, how did all this make him feel? “Quarreling against your law, people bring streams of tears to my eyes” (136).

Recalling it all, the “**Rs**” would have us remember God’s righteousness. “Righteous are you, O LORD, and right are your rules” (137). “Righteousness and all faithfulness were how you appointed your testimonies” (138). “Righteousness of your is righteous forever, and your law is true” (142). “Righteous forever are your testimonies” (144). No matter what God brought his way, God remained righteous through it all. The crucifixion was to be our very righteousness!

“**S-U**” (ש, ר, ק)

Psalm 119:145-168 – The Sixth Hour (Noon and Inexplicable Darkness)

The shining face of God however, turns shadowy in the penultimate note of our song. The “**Ss**” would have us study the Savior’s sorrow. “Soul, mind, and heart cry out, O LORD” (145). “Save me, I call to you” (146). He remembers the long spent night, “Springing up before dawn and crying for help” (147). “Sleepless nights, I confront the watches of

the night, I meditate on your promises” (148). “By your justice, give me life!” (149). “Seeking to persecute me with evil purpose they draw near; they are far from your law” (150).

The “Ts” teach you to tirelessly turn your attention toward *torah*. “Timelessly remember your law, look on my affliction and deliver me” (153). It is his hope in the promises of the Scripture that give him trust. “Till redemption comes, plead my cause” (154). “To your steadfast love, give me life; see how I love your precepts” (159). The totality of it all comes in the last verse, “The sum of your word is truth, all of your righteous rules endure forever” (160).

The “Us” would have us uncover unsurpassed understanding of the events of that day. “Unscrupulous princes persecute me unjustly, but my heart is in awe of your words” (161). “Understand, I hate and abhor falsehood, but I love your law” (163). “Unfailingly, I wait for your salvation, O LORD” (166).

These things are the meditation of Psalmist between the sixth and ninth hour of the day. And to be clear, what a time it was. And we read, “Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour” (Matt 27:45). It is all so clear now, as he hangs there near the end.

“Unwavering, seven times a day I praise you for your righteous rules” (164). This is exactly what he has done. And then the end comes...

“V” (ת)

Psalm 119:169-176 – The Ninth Hour (Forsaken and Forgiven)

Verily, verily, what vanity of men; what vivification of *Christus Victor*? Vain are the vigils that plum the depths of this victory. The final letter of the song, the “Vs” (their letter *tav*), begins with a cry to approach the LORD once more (169). He takes his plea before the throne (170). But his lips pour forth praise (171). His voice sings of the word and commandments of the LORD, for they are right (172). “Victory will be your salvation, O LORD, and your law is my delight” (174). “Vivify my soul so that it will praise you” (175). Resurrection! He will live again.

And with that, at “about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, ... ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’” (Matt 27:46). And he gave up his spirit, and he died, bleeding and broken on the cross because of the

inability of you and I to keep and love and appreciate and meditate and be happy in *torah*. The word of God.

The last verse of Psalm 119 seems almost like an addendum to something that I can only say is either an extremely amazing coincidence, or is rather the mind of an omniscient God applying the events of the darkest day in history to the Great Psalm of the same. They correspond eerily, yet truly. In learning of the death of Christ, and how he is the singer of Psalm 119, you can truly learn to love the word of God.

What is that last verse? “**Veering astray like a lost sheep; seek your servant**” (176). Christ never said this. The Psalmist did. Do you? Do you hear these things and behold commandments you have broken? Do you see the anger for sin, yet the love and grace in undergoing such things on your account? The cross was for you to be justified. The resurrection was so that you might have life from death, life eternal. Then praise God, for he did not leave that body in the grave, but it has been raised from the dead, and Jesus now lives to make intercession for you, so that you may have forgiveness of sins. How many sins. All your sins, from A to Z.

And if that is true, then what must you then do? Do not forget his commands (176). But delight in the law of the LORD (174), and meditate upon it day and night. That is what your Lord did for you. That is the power of you to obey its teaching. This is the application of Psalm 119. And what is that law? Why, it is the whole counsel of God,¹⁶ law and gospel, Old and New, Beginning and End to the glory of the Alpha and Omega who has bled and died that you might have life.

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Vs A Poetic Translation of Psalm 119, by Brenda Boerger (see n. 5)

- 1 **⌘ Absolute Authority**
Absolute Authority, you affirm all who do right,
Adopt your ageless law,
- 2 Agree to your teachings,
Ache for you with all their heart,
- 3 And avoid going astray,
Alert to walk a godly path.
- 4 Anchored firm are all your principles,
Assembled for us to avidly obey.
- 5 Assign me a straight path, Yahweh,
Aligned with your directions!
- 6 And I won't be ashamed,
As I pay attention to all your rules.
- 7 And I'll adore you in all honesty,
As I acquire your approved standards.
- 8 And I'll adhere to your admonitions,
Asking only that you not abandon me.
- 9 **⌘ Beloved Benefactor**
Beloved Benefactor, youths can be blameless
By basing their behavior on your word.
- 10 Bar me from breaking your laws,
Because I'm absorbed in pursuing you.
- 11 Behold, I've branded your promise into my heart,

¹⁶ One final point about the song is worth mentioning in a note. The song delves deep into the Scripture which includes Deuteronomy, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Job, Proverbs, as well as the other Psalms (Goulder, 199). Therefore, the song itself is a reflection on all the Scripture that has come before it, thereby emulating its very own message for you.

Because I don't want to sin against you.
12 Blessed Yahweh,
Better my grasp of your directions.
13 Basic God-breathed standards
Burst from my lips.
14 Boldly I celebrate your teachings,
Beyond bountiful possessions.
15 Burrowing deep, I ponder your principles,
Brood on your personality.
16 Buoyantly I embrace your directions,
Barricaded against betraying your word.

17 **λ Compassionate Counselor**

Compassionate Counselor, kindly care for my life
Conform my character to your word.
18 Clear my mind so I can comprehend
Complexities in your covenant law.
19 Commend me for not conforming to the world.
Correct me by your commands.
20 Constantly I crave your standards,
Carve them into my conscience, Yahweh.
21 Conceited men stand condemned,
Caught straying from your commands.
22 Clear me of their critical accusations.
Consistently I keep your teachings.
23 Countrywide leaders conspire against me but
Concentrating on your directions gives me confidence.
24 Contentedly I cling to your teachings,
Complying with your counsel.

25 **⌈ Dependable Deliverer**

Dependable Deliverer, I'm so discouraged.
Defeat my depression by your word.
26 Diligently I disclosed what I'd done, and you directed me.
Divulge the depths of your directions.
27 Describe the demands of your principles,
Dear Yahweh, help me delve into your wonders.
28 Deadly despair darkens my heart;
Deliver me by your word.
29 Don't let me be deluded;
Detail your law, by divine grace.
30 Determined to obey, I follow your leading,
Dedicating myself to your dictates.
31 Don't disappoint me;
Defend me, I'm devoted to your decrees.
32 Daily, as I discipline myself by your rules,
Deepen my desire to do your will.

33 **⌈ Empowering Enabler**

Empowering Enabler, edify me about your law,
Equipping me to enact it to the end.
34 Enlighten me about your principles,
Ending in my eager obedience.
35 Enable me to keep your rules as instructed,
Embracing them with enthusiasm.
36 Enfold me in empathy for your teachings.
Eliminate all entangling possessions and
37 Enchanting illusions.
Endow me with your essential life.
38 Enact your promise to me, Yahweh,
Ending in my esteeming you more.
39 Enforce your ethical standards and
Erase the endless insults I endure.
40 Empower me by your eternal righteousness;
Earnestly I seek your direction.

41 **⌈ Faithful Father**

Faithful Father, show me your favor;
Fulfill your promise to fight my foes.
42 Faith in your infallible word is a fortress
For facing any affront with confidence.
43 Fail to support me and I'll appear false,
For I affirm your standards will be fulfilled.
44 Firmly I'll make your law my foundation
Forever and ever, Lord Yahweh;
45 For freedom is found,
Following your fundamentals.
46 Fearlessly I profess your teachings before powerful officials,
For you could never afford me shame.
47 Fountains of joy flood my heart,
For every rule of yours is a favorite.
48 Father, I lift my hands in deep affection for your rules,
Focusing on your faithful directions.

49 † **Gracious Giver**

Gracious Giver, you gave your word,
Grant new hope from what you guarantee.
50 Groaning in grief, yet I'm encouraged and
Given new life from your guidelines.
51 Gossip of the arrogant grinds on me constantly;
Guarding myself, I'm constant in keeping your law.
52 God, I can't forget your golden standards,
Gaining comfort from their goodness.
53 Great indignation grips me, Yahweh;
Godless men reject your law.
54 Guest in the house or gracious host,
Gladly I glory in your direction.
55 Gratefully I greet you each night,
Governing myself by your law.
56 God, this is my great privilege;
Guiding myself by your principles.

57 ☐ **Heavenly Helper**

Heavenly Helper, you're all the hope I have;
Heeding your words has been my oath.
58 Hear my heartfelt cry, Yahweh--
Hold to your promise to help!
59 Helplessly, I looked at my habits and
Headed straight back to your teachings.
60 Hereafter, I won't hesitate,
Hurrying to hold firmly to your rules.
61 Hateful men hound me into a trap;
However, your law's the highlight of my life!
62 Happily I sing you hymns at midnight--
Horray for your holy standards!
63 Hospitality I offer those who honor you and
Humbly follow your principles.
64 Horizon to horizon cannot hold your love.
Help me then to comprehend your directions.

65 ☒ **Invaluable Illumination**

Invaluable Illumination, I'm incredibly blessed;
Infallibly you enact your word.
66 I endorse your incomparable rules, Yahweh;
Instruct me in insightful investigation.
67 I erred, incurred your punishment,
Impelled now to live in light of your promise.
68 Inherent goodness, integrity in actions,
Illumine your directions for my benefit.
69 If insolent men spread malicious insults,
I'll imitate your principles anyway.
70 Insensitive, their hearts are impervious to you,
Increasingly my heart's inclined to your law.
71 Indispensable was your intensive discipline,
Initiating me in your instruction.

72 **I**ncalculable wealth is insignificant,
In comparison with the glory of your law.

73 **Just King**

Just King, sovereign Creator,
Jealously take charge so I learn your rules.
74 **J**ustificably I cherish your word and
Joy comes to your children who see it.
75 **J**ust are your changeless standards.
Justice and charity joined hands when you judged me.
76 **J**ust cheer me now with your gentle mercy;
Jewels of your promise pledge it.

(In creating a 26 letter English acrostic, it no longer follows the Hebrew alphabet)

77 **K**indly rejuvenate me in your compassion;
Keenly I'll keep the laws of your jurisdiction.

78 **K**ick out the conceited who accuse me unjustly;
Keep me contemplating your directions.

79 **K**ing Yahweh, let your court worshippers join me,
Kindred to all who acknowledge your teachings.

80 **K**ill any off-key or out-of-kilter thinking;
Kindle in me a commitment to your principles

81 **Loving Lord**

Loving Lord, I'm ill with longing to be liberated,
Lingering for healing from your word.

82 **L**et me lean on your promise, Yahweh!
Long delays leech my strength.

83 **L**ately, I've been laid aside like useless litter.
Lord, but I've loyally followed your leading.

84 **L**ook, I'm losing ground;
Let my enemies' judgment come soon.

85 **L**awgiver, the arrogant break your law and
Lie in wait to lure me into their snare.

86 **L**ine by line, your rules are all reliable but
Liar's still lambaste me. Help!

87 **L**ittle by little my life is leaking away,
Lord, but I'm locked to your principles.

88 **L**et me live because your love is limitless and
Lead me by your lessons.

89 **Mighty Master**

Mighty Master, your word's eternal,
Maintained immutably in heaven.

90 **M**ankind marvels at your enduring faithfulness--
Majestically you set the universe in motion,

91 **M**arching to your matchless standards and
Molding everything to your master plan.

92 **M**y Maker, if your law weren't my mainstay,
My misery might've mastered me.

93 **M**emorizing your directions was like medicine,
Ministering life, with messages from you.

94 **M**y Lord Yahweh, I'm yours, save me.
My mind seeks mastery of your principles.

95 **M**orally corrupt men scheme to murder me,
Meditating on your teachings is a must.

96 **M**atter everywhere is marred and finite but
Measureless is the magnitude of your rule.

97 **Never-Failing Nurturer**

Never-failing Nurturer, your law is so delicious,
Nestling down, I've gnawed on it and found--

98 **N**ot letting your standard out of sight,
Now I outmaneuver the enemy.

99 **N**othing your teachings thought by thought,
Now I can outthink my teachers.

100 **N**ailing down your illuminating rules,
Now my wisdom outshines the rulers'.

101 **N**ever ravenously sinning, Yahweh,
No, I only hunger for your word.

102 Noticeably I relish your directions,
Needing your food to nurture me.
103 Nothing satisfies more than your provision,
Nectar from your promises nourishes me.
104 Narrating your principles brings knowledge,
Now I'm nauseated by all sin.

One and Only

105 One and Only, your word's my light,
Opening my eyes to obstacles in my path.
106 Oaths I've made, I'll keep,
Obliged to obey your holy standards.
107 Oppressed, I groan in pain.
Operate by your word, and make me whole.
108 O Lord, accept my open offerings of praise,
Outline your orders for me.
109 O Yahweh, I'm overwhelmed boy and soul--
Opportunity to apply your principles!
110 Opponents wickedly dig a hole to trap me,
Only I haven't overlooked a single law.
111 Once and for all, I'll honor your teachings,
Overjoyed by their goodness.
112 On and on, I'll obey your directions,
Over and over, till I'm old and die.

Place of Quiet

113 Place of Quiet Refuge, Powerful Shield,
Please answer, for I put my hope in your word.
114 Precious to me is your law but
Pretentious hypocrites I despise.
115 *Pack of sinners, clear the path!*
Passion for God's rules is my purpose!
116 Protect me as you promised, Yahweh,
Providing peace about my expectations.
117 Quickly pull me out of this quagmire and
Quite rightly, I'll honor your directions.
118 Quell those who question you;
Quarreling with your principles is self-defeating.
119 Quashing sinners, you judge them without qualm;
Quite rightly, then, I love your teachings.
120 Quivering, I stand in reverent fear of you,
Quaking with awe at your requirements.

Righteous Redeemer

121 Righteous Redeemer, I respect what's right.
Rescue me from my enemies' reach.
122 Reaffirm that you're my refuge.
Restrain the arrogant from wronging me.
123 Redeem me! I feel like I've been waiting forever.
Remember, I'm relying on your righteous promise.
124 Refresh me with your love.
Reveal the reasoning behind your directions.
125 Reeducate me to recognize right and wrong.
Renew my mind in your teachings.
126 Respond right now, Yahweh.
Rebels reject your law.
127 Radiance from your rules makes me rejoice--
Rarer than gold, more precious than riches!
128 Regarding all your principles as absolutely right.
Results in being absolutely revolted by all wrong.

Supreme Savior

129 Supreme Savior, your teachings are superior,
So I submit myself to them.
130 Schooling in your word sends light,
Spiritual insight for the simple-hearted.
131 Soul and mind, I strain toward you,
Seeking to absorb your rules.
132 Speak softly and satisfy me, Yahweh,

Since that's your practice with all your sincere servants.
 133 **S**et me in step with your steadfast promises,
Saving me from sin's shackles.
 134 **S**ave me, too, from my enemies who surround me,
So I may surrender solely to your principles.
 135 **S**mile on your servant.
Sow your standards into my soul.
 136 **S**inners scorn your sacred law,
So sad tears cascade down my face.
 137 **Trustworthy Teacher**
Trustworthy Teacher, you're righteous.
Truly just are your standards.
 138 **T**utor, your teachings are never off track,
Totally trustworthy, always timely.
 139 **T**reating your word with contempt and
Tormenting me, my enemies stir up a tempest in my heart.
 140 **T**ruly I treasure your promise,
Tested and true, touchstone of purity.
 141 **T**earfully, I'm trivialized and despised, yet
Tirelessly I study your transforming principles.
 142 **T**imeless is your eternal righteousness;
Truth entwines your law.
 143 **T**roubles and trials torture me, Yahweh,
Till your teachings are my only delight.
 144 **T**eacher, your directions are truly on target.
Train me to triumph through them.
 145 **Unchanging Vision**
Unchanging Vision, I beg with all my heart,
Undergird me, I'll obey your directions.
 146 **U**rgently I cry for your salvation, Yahweh.
Unwavering, I'll uphold your teachings.
 147 **U**nfailingly I get up to pray when all is dark,
Uniting my heart to your words of hope.
 148 **U**nsleeping I stay up for late night vigils,
Un unraveling the patterns in your standards.
 149 **V**ision of unchanging love, hear my voice,
Verify your promise, and revitalize me.
 150 **V**iolent men advance, closing in,
Veering far from your everlasting law.
 151 **V**isibly you reveal you're ever near and
Verify your universal rules;
 152 **V**alidating the evidence that your teachings stand,
Victoriously, without vacillation, forever.
 153 **Worthy Witness**
Worthy Witness, if you see my weariness, rescue me.
Would I wander from your principles?
 154 **W**ield your power, my watchword, and vindicate me.
Won't you keep your promise and preserve my life?
 155 **W**icked people see redemption withheld
When they won't heed your warnings.
 156 **W**ell-being from your standards is what I need,
Wise Yahweh, for your mercies are overflowing.
 157 **W**aylaying me, my enemies are overwhelming,
When I refuse to swerve from your wisdom.
 158 **W**eak-willed traitors make me feel worse.
Wallowing in sin, they walk all over your promise.
 159 **W**atch me weave love for your law into my life,
Waiting for life from your unwavering love.
 160 **W**hat's true? The total witness of your word!
What's eternal? Each one of your worthy standards!
 161 **Exalted Excellency**
Exalted Excellency, though experts' attacks are unjust,
Expect my heart to still extol your words.
 162 **E**xulting in your promise, I explore it,
Excavating treasures from your teachings.

163 **E**xploding with hate, I expose lies,
Exhibiting love for the truth of your law,
 164 **E**xpounding on your excellent standards,
Exalting you inexhaustibly.
 165 **E**xceptional security comes from loving your law,
Exemption from stumbling by submitting to it.
 166 **E**xpectantly I wait to be set free,
Explicitly keeping your rules.
 167 **E**xceedingly I love your directions,
Exactly following your axioms.
 168 **E**xamine my conscience, Yahweh.
Executing your axioms and principles exactly is my goal.
 169 **Yahweh, the Zealous**
Yahweh, say yes to these prayers for wisdom.
Your teaching is the yardstick of knowledge.
 170 **Y**ou're the focus of my cry--
Your promises say you'll save me!
 171 **Y**ou're the object of my ongoing adoration--
You willingly teach your rules!
 172 **Y**our word is the theme of my psalm--
Your directions are totally righteous!
 173 **Y**ou're the target of my trust,
Yielded completely to your principles.
 174 **Y**ahweh, I yearn for your salvation;
Your law's the lifeblood of my soul.
 175 **Z**ealous One, your standards are the zenith of my days,
Zestfully I exalt you. I'm alive!
 176 **Z**igzagging and dizzy, I walk in a daze.
 Shepherd, show me your ways!
Zealously I make your rules my prize.