

# Triennial Torah Study – 5<sup>th</sup> Year 18/10/2014

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By Joseph F. Dumond

We continue this weekend with our regular Triennial Torah reading which can be found at [https://sightedmoon.com/sightedmoon\\_2015/files/TriennialCycleBeginningAviv.pdf](https://sightedmoon.com/sightedmoon_2015/files/TriennialCycleBeginningAviv.pdf)

Ex 10-11	1 Kings 19	Ps 119:1-74	Luke 23:50 – 24:53
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## Exodus 10-11

- Locusts:** By this point, Pharaoh's servants are attempting to impress on him that "Egypt is destroyed" (10:7). So he resorts to bargaining with Moses once again. But as he will not accede to God's demands, a mighty wind brings an infestation of locusts on the land. The results are horrible to behold. Whatever vegetation had been left after the hail is now devoured by the locusts. The land is stripped bare. It must have been a wonder to look out over what was once a fertile, bountiful land and to no longer see the color green among the plants (verse 15). Again, Seth, Neper, Osiris and Isis are all defied—as are Shu, god of the air, and Amun, god of the wind. This terrible plague must have left the nation on the brink of starvation. In desperation, Pharaoh even confesses sin and asks forgiveness—outwardly. But his contrition is short-lived. By now, Moses may have become accustomed enough to Pharaoh's stubbornness so as to not be surprised when, once again, Pharaoh changes his mind about releasing the Israelites.

## Darkness and Warning of the Final Plague (Exodus 10:21—11:10)

- Darkness:** Here is a plague that lasted for three days. People could not even leave their homes due to the impact of this event. Comparable to being in a dark closet with even the cracks around the door being covered, this was a major attack on the credibility of the Egyptian sun god—known variously as Re, Ra, Atum, Aten and sometimes Horus. Indeed, though the Egyptians worshiped many gods, none was worshiped as much as the sun. Consider, too, that as much as eclipses were feared in the ancient world, this three-day darkness must have been terrifying beyond belief. Once again, it did not affect the Israelites living in Goshen. Pharaoh again attempts to make a deal by keeping the animals of the Israelites that were not affected by the plagues in Egypt. After all, the food supply of the Egyptians was now at a critical stage—so to him it was not really an unreasonable demand. But before God, Pharaoh was in no position to be making demands. Yet he was angry, to the point of threatening Moses with death if he would not get out of his sight.
- Death of firstborn:** Before leaving, Moses warned Pharaoh of the final plague that was to befall Egypt. The firstborn males of the Egyptians, of their non-Israelite servants and of their animals would surely die—from the palace of Pharaoh to the dungeons. Perhaps this was, in part, a deserved punishment for the Egyptians' slaughtering of *God's* children—the Israelite infants—in previous generations going back to the time of Moses' birth. It was *certainly* for the reason God had given to Moses in Exodus 4: "Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the Lord: "Israel is My son, My firstborn. So I say to you, let My son go that he may serve Me. But if you refuse to let him go, indeed I will kill your son, your firstborn'" (verses 22-23). Moreover,

in killing the firstborn of the animals too, God was again showing His supremacy over the gods of Egypt: “For I... will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the Lord” (12:12). There would be no doubt left among the Egyptians that the God of Israel was indeed the true God!

Besides the many and varied animal deities, God’s action directly challenged Osiris, the giver and ruler of life. Furthermore, in the end, this plague would accomplish the breaking of Egypt—and force Pharaoh to at last release the Israelites. This forcing of Pharaoh to act against his will would demonstrate God’s overthrow of his sovereignty and of the gods who represented it: Hu, the god personifying royal authority; Wadjet, the goddess of royal authority; Sobek, the god epitomizing the might of the pharaohs; Maat, goddess of cosmic order under whose aegis the rulers of Egypt governed; and the war goddess Sakhmet, who would supposedly breathe fire against the enemies of the pharaoh. God would, of course, prove Himself victorious over them all—and over Pharaoh too, who, as mentioned earlier, was himself regarded as the divine incarnation of Horus.

Even at the announcement of this warning, Moses and the Israelites were respected throughout the land because of the miraculous events that had taken place. And not just respected. As *The Nelson Study Bible* notes on Exodus 11:3: “Another remarkable component of the Exodus was the Egyptian’s favor (or grace) toward the Hebrews and admiration for their leader. After all that had happened, we might expect the opposite. But the positive feelings for Moses were shared, amazingly enough, even by Pharaoh’s servants. This, too, is a part of the wit and irony of this great victory the Lord had won over His enemy Pharaoh (who represents evil, sin, ungodliness, and even Satan; see [Revelation] 15:3).” God told the Israelites to ask the Egyptians for silver and gold items—in effect, compensation for their years of slave labor. And after all the Egyptians had witnessed, they were not about to complain. But Pharaoh’s heart was still hardened, even threatening Moses’ life, as already mentioned. Moses, then, having delivered the final warning, at last storms out in anger (11:8). This would be the final confrontation between the two (compare 10:29).

**Supplementary Reading:** “Archaeology and the Book of Exodus: Exit from Egypt,” *The Good News*, March—April 1997, pp. 22-24.

## Elijah Flees From Jezebel (1 Kings 18:41-19:21)

With the storm to end the three-and-a-half-year drought approaching, Elijah, by the power of God, runs the 13 miles to Jezreel faster than Ahab’s horse-drawn chariot.

In spite of the miraculous victory over Baal at Carmel, and the miracles that immediately followed, Jezebel’s threat on Elijah’s life is too much for him. Greatly distraught, he flees to the south, attempting to run away from the danger—his recently strengthened faith apparently evaporated. All of God’s people are subject to such moments. As the apostle James wrote, “Elijah was a man with a nature like ours” (James 5:17). Indeed, it is when we think we stand that we must take warning lest we fall (1 Corinthians 10:12). It should be noted that some mental depression that comes after a big crisis or challenge is usually partly physical in origin. The burst of physical and mental energy that comes with the high level of adrenaline released is often followed by a letdown when the adrenaline wears off.

In his rash flight, Elijah does not even stop in Judah, now ruled by righteous King Jehoshaphat. Instead, he flees *far* to the south, seeking refuge at Mount Sinai (Horeb), where God meets with him. God does not scold Elijah for his fear and self-pity. Instead, He comforts him. God lets Elijah know that he is not alone—that even if he is not aware of them, or has forgotten about them, there are others who have not followed Baal. And to further help combat the depression, God gives Elijah three tasks to perform. (Staying busy in a productive manner often helps in such situations.) God tells him to appoint successors in various responsibilities. One such successor (Jehu) will wipe out all of Ahab’s family, which by then will extend even into the kingdom of Judah. Another will change the leadership of Syria, Israel’s chief enemy of that time. The third is to be Elijah’s own successor, and the man who actually ends up performing the other two tasks.

Elisha's response is immediate and enthusiastic. "He arose and followed Elijah, and became his servant" (1 Kings 19:21)—working under Elijah like an apprentice.

## "Make Me Walk in the Path of Your Commandments" (Psalm 119:1-40)

**Psalm 119**, a massive alphabetic acrostic poem, is the last of the apparent collection of psalms starting with two other acrostic psalms, 111 and 112—thus framing the Egyptian Hallel (113-118). Yet in a number of ways Psalm 119 is in a class unto itself. It is by far the longest of the psalms as well as the longest chapter in the Bible. More than a wisdom psalm providing instruction in how to live, it is an extensive love song to God about His law as well as a plea for deliverance from oppressors. The author, who is now unknown, repeatedly declares his passionate devotion to God's law as a wise and reliable guide for life—and speaks of finding delight and spiritual strength in it in the midst of distress. In general, the "law" or *torah* the psalmist extols refers to more than the first five books of the Bible classified as the Torah or Law. Rather, this word more broadly means "teaching" and includes all of God's revealed instruction in Old Testament Scripture—and we today can even more broadly apply the term to the whole of the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, the entire written Word of God.

It should be obvious that the creation of this lengthy acrostic psalm was a major intellectual undertaking. While God specially inspired the authors of the psalms, as He did all the biblical writers, it is clear from the various styles within the psalms that He made use of their individual talents. And the author of Psalm 119 was no doubt a brilliant thinker. For each of the 22 consonants in the Hebrew language, the psalmist has composed an eight-verse paragraph (called a strophe or stanza in poetic structure). Each of the eight verses in a stanza begins with the same letter. Verses 1-8 begin with *aleph*, the first letter in the Hebrew alphabet. Verses 9-16 begin with *beth*, the second letter in the alphabet, and so on through the remainder of the alphabet. Given this construction, it is likely the poet intended his work to be memorized. Can you imagine memorizing all 176 verses of this psalm? The acrostic device appears in other psalms (25; 34; 37; 111; 112; 145), where it also serves as a memory aid.

Psalm 119 uses eight different words to designate God's revealed instruction to humankind:

*torah* "law" (also more broadly meaning instruction)

*'edot* "testimonies" (reiterations of God's standards)—rendered "statutes" in the IV

*piqqudim* "precepts" (injunctions or imposed rules)

*huqqim* "statutes" (inscribed, enacted laws) —"decrees" (NIV)

*mitzvot* "commandments" or "commands" (constitutional orders)

*mishpatim* "judgments" (judicial rulings for living)—"laws" and "ordinances" in the NIV

*dabar* "word" (sometimes here in the sense of law, sometimes of promise)

*'imrah* "word" (saying, sometimes here in the sense of law, but more often of promise)

These various terms the psalmist "distributes throughout the 22 stanzas (using all eight in *He, Waw, Heth, Yodh, Kaph, Pe*—never using less than six), employing a different order in each stanza" (*Zondervan NIV Study Bible*, note on Psalm 119). As another commentary points out regarding this psalm: "Students disagree on this, but it appears that every verse contains a direct mention of God's Word except seven: verses 3, 37, 84, 90, 121, 122, and 132. If you count 'ways' [from Hebrew *derek*] as a synonym for God's Word, then you can eliminate verses 3 and 37.... The writer may have been meditating on Psalm 19 where David listed six names for the Scriptures, five of which are found in 119—law, testimony, precept, commandment, and judgment. Some of the vocabulary of 19 is also found in 119, including perfect or blameless...pure...righteous and righteousness...and meditate or meditation.... Both compare the Word of God to gold ([19:]10/119:72; 127) and honey ([19:]10/119:103), and in both there is an emphasis on keeping or obeying God's Word" (Warren Wiersbe, *Be Exultant: Psalms 90-150*, introductory notes on Psalm 119).

This huge composition no doubt took a great deal of time, effort and care to create. The *Zondervan NIV Study Bible* puts it well: "The alphabetic acrostic form, especially one as elaborate as this, may appear arbitrary and artificial to a modern reader (as if the author merely selected a traditional form from the poet's workshop and then labored to fill it with pious sentences), but a sympathetic and reflective reading of this devotional will

compel a more favorable judgment. The author had a theme that filled his soul, a theme as big as life, that ranged the length and breadth and height and depth of a person's walk with God. Nothing less than the use of the full power of language would suffice, and of that the alphabet was a most apt symbol" (note on Psalm 119). Commentator Wiersbe remarks on this unknown psalmist: "Whoever the author was, he is a good example for us to follow, for he had an intense hunger for holiness and a passionate desire to understand God's Word in a deeper way. In all but fourteen verses, he addresses his words to the Lord personally, so this psalm is basically a combination of worship, prayer, praise, and admonition. The writer must have been a high profile person because he mentioned the opposition of rulers (vv. 23, 161; 'princes' in KJV and NASB), a word that can refer to Gentile rulers or local Jewish tribal leaders (Neh. 3), and he also spoke to kings (v. 46). In the psalm, there are no references to a sanctuary, to sacrifices, or to a priestly ministry [perhaps indicating a time of apostasy or the period between the temple's destruction and reconstruction]. The cast of characters includes the Lord God, a remnant of godly people in the nation (vv. 63, 74, 79, 120, etc.), the psalmist, and the ungodly people who despised him (v. 141), persecuted him (vv. 84-85, 98, 107, 109, 115, 121-122, etc.), and wanted to destroy him (v. 95). The psalmist referred to them as 'the proud' or 'the arrogant' (vv. 21, 51, 69, 78, 85, 122). They were people who were born into the covenant but did not value the spiritual riches of that relationship. They disdained the law and openly disobeyed it. The writer was reproached by them (vv. 22-23, 39, 42) and suffered greatly from their false accusations (vv. 50-51, 61, 67, 69-71, 75, 78)" (introductory notes on Psalm 119). The same commentator goes on to explain his reasons for thinking the author may have been the prophet Jeremiah on the basis of the above criteria. Others have made the same identification, though David is more typically seen as the author.

Whoever wrote it, Psalm 119 remains a powerful witness to us today. As Wiersbe comments: "The basic theme of Psalm 119 is the practical use of the Word of God in the life of the believer. When you consider that the writer probably did not have a complete Old Testament, let alone a complete Bible [and probably not a personal copy of every scriptural scroll], this emphasis is both remarkable and important. Believers today [personally] own complete Bibles, yet how many of them say that they love God's Word and get up at night or early in the morning to read it and meditate on it (vv. 55, 62, 147-148)? How many believers ignore the Old Testament Scriptures or read the Old Testament in a careless and cursory manner? Yet here was a man who rejoiced in the Old Testament Scripture-which was the only Word of God he had-and considered God's Word his food (v. 103) and his greatest wealth! (vv. 14, 72, 127, 162). His love for the Word of God puts today's believers to shame. If the psalmist with his limited knowledge and resources could live a godly and victorious life feeding on the Old Testament, how much more ought believers today live for the Lord. After all, we have the entire Bible before us and two millennia of history behind us!" (same notes).

So true. And those professing believers who argue that God's laws are obsolete, arbitrary and unnecessary would have a hard time convincing the writer of this psalm of their position-much less the great God who ultimately inspired this psalm to be written!

As to the psalm's setting of persecution by enemy oppressors, we should all be able to identify with this element. For even if we have no obvious adversaries on a human level, all of God's people are at constant war with the unseen demonic spirit rulers of this world (see Ephesians 6:12).

Concerning the arrangement of Psalm 119, "apart from the obvious formal structure dictated by the chosen acrostic form, little need (or can) be said. It must be noted, however, that the first three and the last three verses were designed as introduction and conclusion to the whole. The former sets the tone of instruction in godly wisdom; the latter succinctly restates and summarizes the main themes. It may also be observed that the middle of the psalm has been marked by a similar three-verse introduction to the second half.... For the rest, the thought meanders, turns back upon itself and repeats (with various nuances)" (*Zondervan*, note on Psalm 119).

As mentioned, the **Aleph** strophe or stanza (verses 1-8) begins with an introduction to the rest of the psalm that explains that the way for a person to be blessed, to experience true happiness in life, is to be "undefiled" or "blameless" (NIV) in the way he lives. To be *blameless* does not mean that one never sins. Rather, it means that one is beyond reproach. Nothing can be held against him. This comes from always repenting when one sins, never failing to return to God and His ways.

As is clear from the rest of the stanza (verses 4-8), the poet himself is by no means perfect. After stating his knowledge of God's requirements of us (verse 4), he expresses the wish that his own ways were naturally

directed to meet them (verse 5), implying that they were not. If his natural inclination were to obey God, then he wouldn't be ashamed when he looked into God's Word (verse 6). Because the human heart is hostile toward God (Romans 8:7) and deceptively wicked (Jeremiah 17:9), the psalmist finds that God's law, like a mirror, reflects his inadequacies (James 1:24; Romans 3:20).

As he learns to better follow God's righteous way, he will be able to praise God from an upright heart (verse 7). The author understands that in keeping God's law, his heart will move away from its selfish orientation toward the righteousness of God: "But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does" (James 1:25, NIV).

The stanza closes with the psalmist's intention to strive to obey God, praying for God's forgiveness—that he will not be forsaken (Psalm 119:8), possibly hinting at his present suffering, as mentioned later. Indeed, repentance always includes a resolve to follow God's laws.

In the **Beth** strophe (verses 9-16), the writer asks, "How can a young man keep his way pure?" (verse 8, NIV). Or in a general sense: how can we honor the promise we made to keep God's law?

Some have thought "young man" to be a characterization of the author. This is possible, but others maintain that "more likely it indicates instruction addressed to the young after the manner of the wisdom teachers (see 34:11; Pr 1:4; Ecc 11:9; 12:1...)" (*Zondervan NIV Study Bible*, note on Psalm 119:9). While specific younger disciples could have been the intended audience, it may simply be that the psalm was designed for memorization by all the young people of the nation as part of their education.

Of course, the psalmist was also preaching to himself. In his prayer to God, He was committing himself to God's way. In this stanza he declares a number of things he will do to keep his life clean, giving us principles to apply in our own lives.

The author states that a person determined to live a pure, obedient life will *take heed* (verse 9) and be mindful and aware of the context of life. God is the Author of life, and His Word is an instruction book for how life works (as well as how it doesn't). A wise individual will be conscious of and utilizing such a priceless resource so readily available.

Such a person will also *seek God* with enthusiasm-wholeheartedly (verse 10)-spending time in study, prayer, meditation. He will delight in God's Word and let it capture his thoughts (verses 11, 15-16). Verse 11 shows that God's Word must be more to us than something that we read. It must be written on our hearts and minds (see Jeremiah 31:33) -hidden, protected, within us as valuable treasure (see Psalm 119:14).

Furthermore a committed person will willingly *learn* from God by approaching his studies with a teachable attitude. And he will *discuss* with others what he has learned from the law (verse 13).

Yet the psalmist does not fail to acknowledge that his success ultimately depends not on his own efforts, but on what God will do. In addition to the things an individual must do in living a righteous life, the writer states here two things that *God* must do.

First, God must motivate and empower him to keep him on track. "Do not let me stray from your commands" (verse 10, NIV). God will not take away an individual's free will and responsibility to choose to obey, but He will undertake loving surveillance and shepherding, helping his servant to perceive and aspire to the right way and follow it: "You comprehend my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways.... You have hedged me behind and before, and laid Your hand upon me.... Where shall I go from your Spirit.... Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me" (Psalm 139:2-10).

Second, God must teach him (verse 12). The author affirms the importance of God opening his understanding. He wanted to learn by studying God's Word and putting it into practice. This does not preclude learning from other teachers, but God would be his primary Instructor. Because God thoroughly knows each individual, He tailors the timing, the presentation, the "aha" experiences for all of His children-the pattern He established for parents in every age (see Deuteronomy 6:6-7). And realize again that rather than giving us minute direction in every action of our life, God gives us widely applicable *principles* through which we learn the how and why of living His way. By analogy, a wise teacher leads his students to understanding the lesson, not to merely reciting what they hear. Such understanding helps us to think and reason more clearly about our choices.

We must always remember that we cannot succeed in living God's way on our own. We desperately need His intervening spiritual power and continuing instruction.

In the **Gimel** strophe (verses 17-24) the psalmist continues the thought of God teaching him and first explicitly mentions his present trial. He needs God to open his mind to revelation from God's Word (verse 18). He needs God's help to live and to live by that Word (verse 17). Commentator George Knight remarks on verse 17 that the key word in Psalm 119 "is the word *live*.... For the *Torah*, God is the Living God. This Living God offers his children *his* life, and that is not mere biological life. It is life in the Spirit, to which physical death has nothing to say. The five books of the Pentateuch culminate at Deut. 30:15, 19 with God's 'Word': 'See I have set before you this day life and good, death and evil.' The passage then goes on to declare that 'life' is bound up with love and with obedience to God's revealed *commandments, statutes, and ordinances*" (The Daily Study Bible Series: *Psalms*, Vol. 2, note on Psalm 119:17-24).

The poet declares that he is a "stranger on earth" (verse 19, NIV; compare verse 54). The Israelites were considered to be strangers and sojourners-following laws and customs not of this world and looking forward to God's messianic Kingdom (see Leviticus 25:23; 1 Chronicles 19:15). Sadly the Israelites often conformed to the idolatrous world around them, leaving only a faithful remnant who continued as God's special people-foreign to this world and its ways. In the New Testament, believers are referred to as strangers and pilgrims who look for a better country-that of God's coming Kingdom (see Hebrews 11:13; 1 Peter 2:11). The writer faced the dilemma of dual citizenship-living under wayward human dominion while yearning for God's righteous administration (verse 20). Yeshua foresaw the difficulties His disciples would confront as they lived *in* the world while not *of* it. He prayed that God would protect them from evil and set them apart by His word of truth (John 17:14-17). Similarly, the psalmist asks God to make His commandments (His truth) clearly evident (Psalm 119:19). In the final verses of this stanza, the psalmist desires relief from those who are arrogant, scornful and contemptuous (verses 21-22). They stray from God's commands and earn for themselves an inevitable outcome. As already mentioned, the author was evidently an individual of some importance, possibly in the government-perhaps an advisor or prophet-because he was slandered by rulers (verse 23). If the writer was a prophet and brought a corrective message from God, it follows that evil rulers might conspire to kill him (compare verses 85, 95, 110). Whether or not the prophet Jeremiah was the author of the psalm, he provides a perfect example of this, for his life was repeatedly threatened because he faithfully brought warning messages to the kingdom of Judah and its leadership. As he said, "They have dug a pit to take me, and hidden snares for my feet. Yet, LORD, You know all their counsel which is against me, to slay me" (Jeremiah 18:22-23).

The psalmist turns his present crisis over to God and takes comfort in serving Him. Rather than taking vengeance or being unduly distressed by slanderers, he takes comfort in God's laws as his "counselors" (Psalm 119:24). This may be a hint that the religious hierarchy in the land was corrupt and unreliable-so that the author in this environment had to look to God's words alone as his teachers and spiritual advisers. Of course, even when there are faithful teachers to learn from, their teachings must be confirmed through the direct counsel of Scripture (see Acts 17:11; 20:27).

In the **Daleth** stanza (verses 25-32) the poet laments over his circumstances, being "weary with sorrow" (verse 28, NIV). He "clings to the dust" (verse 25a)-being oppressively crushed down (compare 44:24-25). He asks God to *revive* him (119:25b)-conveying the sense of *saving from death*. The Hebrew word means to *restore* or *renew-to breathe new life* into something. Thus, the psalmist turns to God for renewal at a time of terrible despondency.

The writer has opened up to God, declaring His ways (verse 26)-that is, His circumstances and how he has been responding to them-and knows that God has answered him, helping him to remain properly focused. He asks that God would further teach him (same verse) and increase his understanding (verse 27) of how to apply God's laws at this time. We may generally understand God's laws but often will need more direct instruction and encouragement in difficult circumstances.

The plea "Remove from me the way of lying" (verse 29) or "Keep me from deceitful ways" (NIV) could refer either to being personally kept away from this wrong way or to be protected from others who are slandering. The psalmist himself is committed to remaining truthful and faithful-and to looking to God's judgments to govern his life (verse 30).

The end of verse 29, "Grant me Your law graciously," runs counter to those who claim that law and grace do not go together. As commentator Wiersbe remarks: "'Law and grace are in opposition!' many declare, but the psalmist testified that law and grace worked together in his life (vv. 29 and 58). God used Moses to liberate the people from Egypt, but then God gave Moses the law to give to Israel at Sinai. The German philosopher Goethe

wrote, 'Whatever liberates our spirit without giving us self-control is disastrous.' Law and grace are not enemies, for law sets the standard and grace enables us to meet it (Rom. 8:1-3)" (introductory notes on Psalm 119).

Having been forced to, as we saw, cling to the dust (verse 25), the poet resolves that inwardly he will cling to God's laws as he prays that God will not let him fall into shame and dishonor (verse 31).

He concludes this stanza with the metaphor of running the course of God's commandments with an enlarged heart (verse 32). Some see the enlarged heart as signifying increased joy or understanding-and it may, as an increased heart or mind could signify greater depth of understanding (compare 1 Corinthians 2:10-14). But in connection with running a course, the imagery more likely seems to concern spiritual power. In a physical sense, we can perhaps imagine a person running so hard that his heart gives out. Yet here God gives a new heart-a bigger, stronger, more powerful heart (a spiritual heart empowered by God's Holy Spirit)-to enable the runner to run the course of God's way of life and not faint (compare Ezekiel 18:31; Isaiah 40:31).

In the **He** strophe (verses 33-40) the psalmist states his position in relationship to God. He is, he tells God, "Your servant, who is devoted to fearing You" (verse 38). His responsibility as the Lord's servant is to properly revere God and wholeheartedly observe and keep God's law until the end of his life (verses 33-34). Yet, as in other verses, he understands his need for divine help to do God's will.

Yeshua explained to His disciples that they would need to abide in Him and let His words abide in them if they were to bear much fruit: "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me" (John 15:4).

The writer knows that while he must personally strive to do what God says, he must depend on God's help to succeed or his labor will be in vain (compare Psalm 127:1-2). Therefore he makes several requests of God. Two are knowledge-based: "teach me...the way" (verse 33) and "give me understanding" (verse 34). The author can read the law, but he needs God to teach him *the way*-to guide him in how to live the law every day, how to apply it, how to think and make decisions the way God thinks. He asks for *understanding* so that the law will be more than a legalistic code. He wants to live a principle-centered life based on knowing the spiritual intent of God's law.

Three of his requests are more in the realm of empowerment and motivation. He needs God's power to do what is right: "make me walk" (verse 35), "incline my heart" (verse 36), "turn my eyes away" (verse 37). Not that God would force upon the psalmist a course of action, but that He would motivate and strengthen the writer's will in the sense that the apostle Paul describes: "For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13).

The psalmist is particularly attuned to the danger of covetousness-of letting wrong attraction to worldly things of no ultimate spiritual value detract him from God's way (verses 36-37)-and so must we be. Covetousness is forbidden in the last of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:17; Deuteronomy 5:21). Interestingly, this command regulates thoughts in the mind-showing the spiritual nature of God's law even in Old Testament times. Yeshua also warns us, "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses" (Luke 12:15). We must instead focus on what we really need-God's spiritual blessings.

The poet sums up with his longing for God's laws and a prayer that God will enable him to live by them-revitalizing him to walk in the right way (verse 40).

## "The Cords of the Wicked Have Bound Me; But I Have Not Forgotten Your Law" (Psalm 119:41-74)

In the **Waw** strophe (verses 41-48) the psalmist prays for God's promised deliverance (verse 41; compare verse 49) so that he will be able to continue to live by God's law (verse 44) and to proclaim God's words to others-to his detractors (verse 42) and to kings (verse 46). This could imply that the writer was himself a prophet such as Jeremiah, yet others take it merely to mean that the writer, or anyone, should be able to unabashedly discuss

their Bible-based beliefs when asked to defend them, even in the presence of kings (compare Matthew 10:18-20; Luke 21:12-15; 1 Peter 3:15-16).

The words of Psalm 119:43, "Take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth," are paraphrased in The Living Bible as: "May I never forget your words." Yet they may more specifically be asking that God not allow the psalmist's proclamation of God's truth to others to cease by being silenced in prison or death.

Through God's intervention the author will be able to live by God's law "forever and ever" (verse 44)-clearly demonstrating his belief in eternal life as the reward of the righteous. This is part of the liberating aspect of God's law, as described in the next verse.

The Hebrew word in verse 45 translated "liberty" or "freedom" (NIV) literally means "a wide space"-metaphorically meaning unconfined by suffering or oppression. The apostle James referred to God's law as "the perfect law of liberty" (James 1:25). John said that God's commandments "are not burdensome" (1 John 5:3). "The psalmist celebrates the freedom that is found in obeying God's instruction. Although many think of laws, instructions, and commandments (v. 47) as limiting and restricting, the Law of God paradoxically frees us. It frees us from sin (v. 133) and gives us the peace that comes from following the Lord's instructions (v. 165)" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on Psalm 119:44-45). Moreover, it leads to the ultimate freedom, found in Christ, of reigning in God's Kingdom forever-liberated for eternity from death and all the burdens and sorrows of this present life.

The poet closes the stanza with two expressions of love for God's commandments and a commitment to meditate on His statutes.

In the **Zayin** strophe (verses 49-56) the psalmist asks God to "remember" the word that caused him to have hope. The psalmist doesn't remind God of which promise comprises *the word*, but it likely involves the promise of salvation or deliverance (compare verse 41). Of course, God knows what is meant. "When applied to the Lord, the word 'remember' means 'to pay attention to, to work on behalf of.'...Remembering is not recalling, for God never forgets; it is relating to His people in a special way" (Wiersbe, *Be Exultant*, note on verses 49-56). This hope-that God would work out a specific promise-comforted the psalmist in his affliction and enlivened him (verse 50).

His present affliction (same verse) involves proud, wicked men who hold him in contempt (verses 51, 53). Some aspect of God's law is at issue. The adversaries have forsaken the law and deride the author for his faith. "Yet," he says, "I do not turn aside from Your law" (verse 51). He is angry: "Indignation grips me because of the wicked" (verse 53, NIV; compare verse 139). But he directs his thoughts toward God's statutes (verse 54). They become his songs, subjects for composing praises to God-as they indeed form the basis for this very psalm (compare Ephesians 5:19).

The phrase "in the house of my pilgrimage," literally "in my temporary house" (*Zondervan NIV Study Bible*, note on Psalm 119:54), identifies life as a journey. As a stranger and pilgrim on the earth (see verse 19), the psalmist sings praises to God wherever he finds himself.

In declaring to God, "I remember Your name in the night" (verse 55), the writer shows that his religion is not just an outward show during the day. He thinks about God and all He stands for at night (compare verses 62, 148) when he is reflecting on what is important to him-and He resolves to obey Him.

The psalmist ends the strophe by stating that God's law "has become mine." In essence, he has internalized it to an extent that it is *his* way of living-not just God's way, not just his parents' way. By keeping the law of God, he has made it his own (verse 56).

In the **Heth** strophe (verses 57-64) the poet proclaims, "You are my portion, O LORD" (verse 57). As commentator Wiersbe notes: "This is real estate language and refers to the apportioning of the land of Canaan to the tribes of Israel (78:55; Josh. 13-21). The priests and Levites were not given an inheritance in the land because the Lord was their inheritance and their portion (Num. 18:20-24; Deut. 10:8-9; 12:12). Jeremiah, the priest called to be a prophet, called the Lord 'the portion of Jacob' [i.e., of all Israel] (Jer. 10:16; 51:19; Lam. 3:24), and David used the same image in Psalm 16:5-6" (note on 119:57-64). Believers today should consider God as *our* portion, through whom all our needs and wants are supplied for eternity.

Because he knew that the Lord was his portion, the psalmist requests God's favor and mercy (verse 58). He "made haste" and "did not delay" to bring his life into harmony with God's ways, obeying His commandments (verses 59-60). These words are instructive. We should always be quick to follow God's commands. And

whenever our lives fall out of harmony with God's ways, we must not put off repentance-imagining we will eventually get around to it, letting ourselves drift farther and farther away from God-for we thereby jeopardize our future (see Hebrews 2:1-3). If your life is going that way, ask God to help you turn around. Do it today. Don't wait for a tomorrow that may never come.

The psalmist's enemies had no regard for God's law, and they bound him in cords (Psalm 119:61). This could be figurative of some type of ensnarement, or it may refer more literally to bondage and imprisonment-such as what Jeremiah experienced. Yet despite his predicament, the writer holds fast to God's law and gives thanks to God for it in the middle of the night (verses 61-62; compare verse 55).

The author is at great odds with his lawless oppressors but sees as companions all those who fear and obey God (verse 63). He realizes he is not alone in his struggle (compare verses 74, 79)-and that was no doubt a source of encouragement, as it should be to all of us today. He further recognizes that in spite of his present troubles, the earth is still full of God's *hesed*, his lovingkindness and mercy (verse 64).

In the **Teth** strophe (verses 65-72) the psalmist focuses on God dealing "well" (Hebrew *tob*, "good") with him (verse 65), admitting that he went astray in some manner before his present affliction and that this led to his repentance (verse 67)-which he sees as *tob*, good (verse 71).

The Hebrew word *tob* is used six times in this stanza. The psalmist declares that God *is* good and *does* good (verse 68). In verse 72, he states that God's law *is better* (from *tob*-i.e., "more good") than treasure (compare verses 14, 127, 162).

The poet calls his enemies "proud." He states that they have "forged a lie against me" and later that they "almost made an end of me on earth" (verse 87). He says their hearts are "fat as grease" (verse 70)-or "fat, without feeling" (Green's Literal Translation). The imagery is that of being covered in thick fat and difficult to penetrate. The NIV substitutes "callous" for "fat." Yet, in spite of being persecuted, the psalmist will keep God's precepts and delight in His law (verses 69-70).

He learned from his earlier mistake and from the correction that resulted. Undoubtedly it was not pleasant to live through the situation. The writer can look back, however, and say that it was "good"-that it was more than worth it (verses 71-72; compare verse 75). He recognized it as the opportunity for spiritual growth that it was.

As the book of Hebrews tells us, "Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" (12:11; see verses 5-11).

In the **Yod** strophe (verses 73-80) the psalmist recognizes that God as man's Maker is the One who best understands how man, His creation, is supposed to properly function-so he seeks God's direction in how to live (verse 73).

The writer desires to encourage others who revere God by maintaining hope in God's Word through his affliction and continuing in obedience (see verses 74, 79; compare verse 63). He knows that God has allowed his present affliction and that His judgments have been right (verse 75). Yet he now prays for relief and comfort, as God has promised (verse 76). This will be a powerful witness to God's people-and so will the final outcome of all this.

The poet reiterates that his enemies are proud and continues the pattern of contrasting their wrongdoing with His faithfulness: "They treated me wrongfully...but I will meditate on Your precepts" (verse 78). "They have forged a lie against me, but I will keep your precepts" (verse 69). They "have bound me...but I have not forgotten Your law" (verse 61). They "have me in derision...yet I do not turn aside from Your law" (verse 51).

He chooses to let God deal with his enemies while he finds comfort in the law, striving to be blameless, praying that they will be put to shame rather than him (verses 78, 80)-again as part of an important witness to all of God's people.

## Luke 23:50-24:53

Our portion from the renewed covenant writings opens with the record of Joseph of Arimathea going to Pilate and securing the body of Yeshua for burial. He wrapped the body in linen and placed it in a tomb that had never been used. The women from Galil saw where the body was laid and went to prepare spices and perfumes for the body but had to wait until after the Sabbath.

Then early on the first day they returned to apply the spices and perfumes but found the tomb empty and the stone that covered the opening, rolled away. They were met with two messengers from heaven who reminded them of the Words of our Master concerning His suffering and resurrection. Upon hearing this they ran and returned to the place where the taught ones were and told them of the Good News but they did not believe.

Peter arose and ran to the tomb to see for himself and indeed he did see the linen clothes laying there in the tomb and Yeshua was not there. He went away marvelling. Two other men were on their way to Emmaus and discussing all the matters that had recently occurred in the city. Yeshua Himself appeared and walked with them but they could not "see" Him. He talked and witnessed with them, explaining all the things that had to take place. When they sat down and He broke the bread with them... they finally "saw" Him and were amazed!

They hurriedly returned to Jerusalem and went to where the other disciples were and shared with them what had happened and that they had seen and talked with the risen Master. At that time, Yeshua appeared to all of them at once and said, "peace to you." They were fearful and thought they were seeing a spirit and Yeshua told them to feel His Hands and His Feet then asked for some food. He then assured them that all these things were what He was speaking to them about during His ministry with them in fulfillment of the Torah, Prophets, and Psalms. Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.