

GOOD FENCES

Meeting God in the Psalms: Psalm 119

November 14, 2021

*How can a young man keep his way pure?
By living according to your word.
I seek you with all my heart;
do not let me stray from your commands.
I have hidden your word in my heart
that I might not sin against you.
Psalm 119:9-11*

Reading Psalm 119

1. Psalm 119 is a double perfect acrostic, making the “perfection” of Torah even more excellent
2. Psalm 119 uses several different terms for God’s law (see *EBC* introduction to Psalm 119):

torah, law (25x) 119:44; see Deuteronomy 6:1-3; 17:11; Isaiah 1:10; Malachi 2:6

dabar, word (24+x) 119:11; see Deuteronomy 4:1-1-13 where *dabar* refers both to the Decalogue and to the words of Moses; 6:6 of the *shema*; Proverbs 1:23; Isaiah 66; with a special look to John 1:1-14 and its connection to Genesis 1

mispatim, laws (23X) 119:7; see Deuteronomy 4:1; Isaiah 26:8

edot, statutes, testimonies (23x) 119:2; see Exodus 16:24 of the “Testimony” in the ark

misvot, commands (22x) 119:166; see Leviticus 4:2; Deuteronomy 6:1-2; Daniel 9:4-5

huqqim, decrees (21x) 119:8; Exodus 15:25-26; Malachi 3:7, 4:4

piqqudim, precepts (21x) 119:69; see Psalm 19:8; then almost exclusively in Psalm 119

‘mrah, word or promise (19x) 119:11; beginning in Genesis 1:3 with the important verb

derek, way (11x) 119:30; see Deuteronomy 8:6; 2 Kings 16:3; Proverbs 3:6; Isaiah 2:3

3. James Smith suggests this internal structure of Psalm 119 which has elements of lament (see 119:105-107, 119:71-71), praise, liturgy and wisdom:

God’s Word and the soul, (1-56) *aleph – zayin*

God’s Word and society, (57-112) *heth - nun*

God’s Word and his Sanctuary (113-168) *samech - shin*

God’s Word and the shepherd, an appendix (169-176) *tav*

Celebrating Torah

⌘ Aleph

- 1 Blessed are they whose ways are blameless,
who walk according to the law of the LORD.
- 2 Blessed are they who keep his statutes
and seek him with all their heart.
- 3 They do nothing wrong;
they walk in his ways.
- 4 You have laid down precepts
that are to be fully obeyed.
- 5 Oh, that my ways were steadfast
in obeying your decrees!
- 6 Then I would not be put to shame
when I consider all your commands.
- 7 I will praise you with an upright heart
as I learn your righteous laws.
- 8 I will obey your decrees;
do not utterly forsake me.

Psalm 119

1. Torah Psalms point to Jesus (even though this “blessing” is plural, see Psalms 1, 15, 24)
2. Beginning with 119:4, each line turns our attention to the Giver of Torah
3. The psalmist assumes God’s law is going to change us (see Shiao Chong’s latest *Banner* editorial)

How to make God’s law work for me

1. God’s law belongs in the heart
 - ⁹ How can a young man keep his way pure?
By living according to your word.
 - ¹⁰ I seek you with all my heart;
do not let me stray from your commands.
 - ¹¹ I have hidden your word in my heart
that I might not sin against you.

Psalm 119:9-11

2. God's law is valuable!

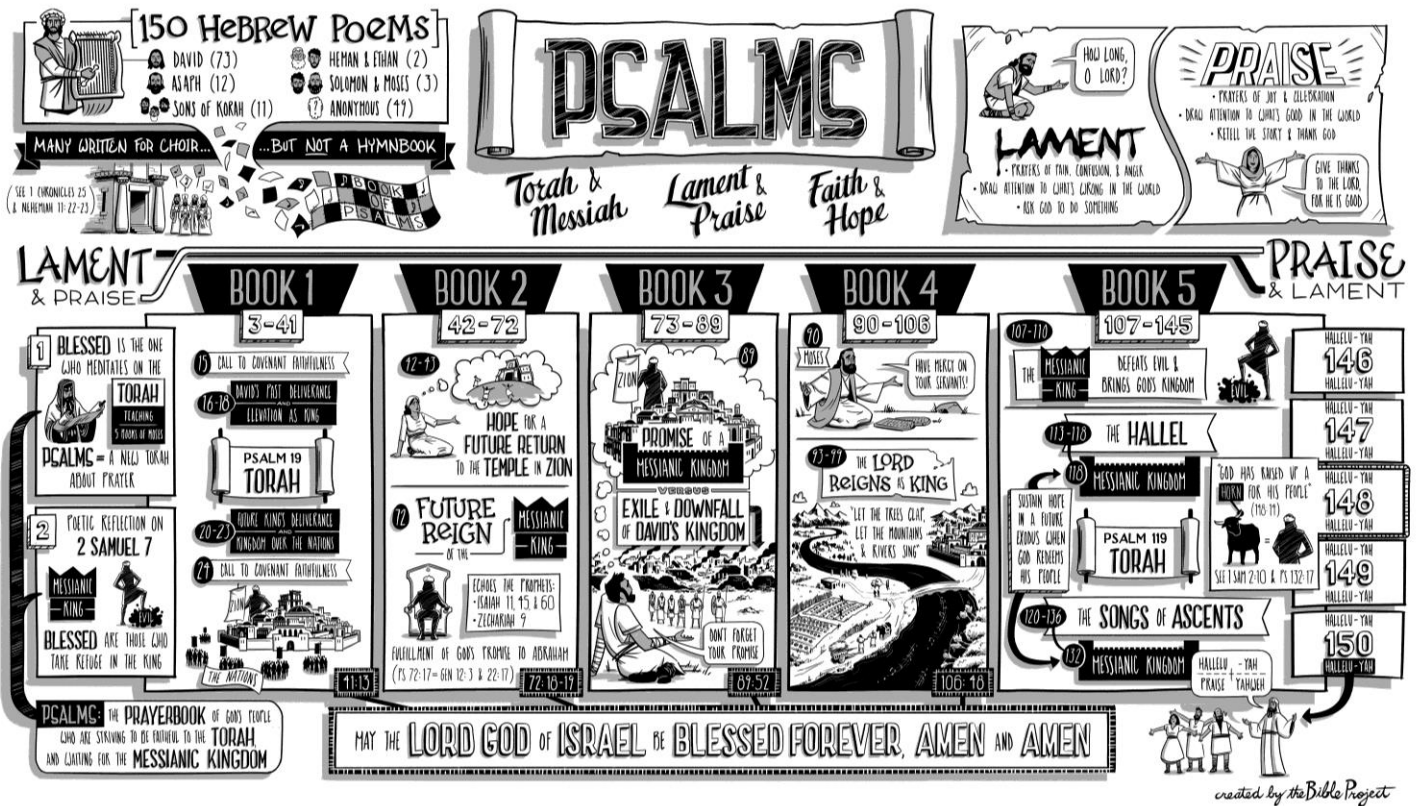
- ⁹⁷ Oh, how I love your law!
I meditate on it all day long.
- ⁹⁸ Your commands make me wiser than my enemies,
for they are ever with me.
- ⁹⁹ I have more insight than all my teachers,
for I meditate on your statutes.
- ¹⁰⁰ I have more understanding than the elders,
for I obey your precepts
- ¹⁰³ How sweet are your words to my taste,
sweeter than honey to my mouth!

Psalm 119

3. I need a lamp most when things are dark (this is the lament edge to Psalm 119)

- ¹⁰⁵ Your word is a lamp to my feet
and a light for my path.
- ¹⁰⁶ I have taken an oath and confirmed it,
that I will follow your righteous laws.
- ¹⁰⁷ I have suffered much;
preserve my life, O LORD, according to your word.
- ¹⁰⁸ Accept, O LORD, the willing praise of my mouth,
and teach me your laws.
- ¹⁰⁹ Though I constantly take my life in my hands,
I will not forget your law.
- ¹¹⁰ The wicked have set a snare for me,
but I have not strayed from your precepts.
- ¹¹¹ Your statutes are my heritage forever;
they are the joy of my heart.
- ¹¹² My heart is set on keeping your decrees
to the very end.

Psalm 119:105-112



Resources for the Psalms

Please be sure to have a copy of the [Bible Project's poster](#) on the Psalms.

I appreciate the bibestudytools.com study of Psalm 87 in the “Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary” series. I’ve attached this study to my notes.

Dr. [Ron Allen has a wonderful study](#) of Psalm 87 in “Biblioteca Sacra”.

Both the *Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Zondervan, 1991) and James E. Smith's *Wisdom Literature and Psalms* (College Press, 1995) have good introductions to Psalm 119.

I can see Dr. Ron Allen's influence in the study notes on the Psalms in the *Nelson Study Bible* (Thomas Nelson, 1997). This is a NKJV text Bible which gives a wonderful new translation to read.

Enduring Word has a very good intro to Psalm 119 at <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/psalm-119/>

Tabletalk has a wonderful article on Psalm 118 at <https://tabletalkmagazine.com/posts/reading-the-psalms-with-luther/>

Shiao Chong's “Domesticating Scripture” editorial is not yet posted online, but the entire current issue can be downloaded at https://s3.amazonaws.com/prod.assets.thebanner/38989%20Banner%202021-11_final%20lr.pdf

John Piper's Desiring God ministry has some good resources at <https://www.desiringgod.org/scripture/psalms/119>

See Spurgeon's “Loving the Law of the Lord” at <http://www.spurgeon.org/vols52-54/chs3090.pdf> and “Two Good Things” on Psalm 119:71 at <https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/two-good-things/#flipbook/>