

1. INTRODUCTION:

- a. Psalm 119 is the longest Psalm in Scripture. Because of its emphasis on the “Law” it is categorized as a “wisdom Psalm.” The Psalm also includes elements of lament, thanksgiving, innocence, praise, and confidence in God. These elements are reflections of the authors love and passion for God.
- b. Psalm 119 is generally referred to in Hebrew as "Ashrei temimei derecho," meaning "happy [Blessed] are those whose way is perfect [Blameless]" – which are the opening words of the Psalm.

2. AUTHOR, PURPOSE AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT:

- a. The Psalm is written anonymously. There is nothing that would lead to a known historical figure as the author. However, the author was an amazingly creative and gifted writer. One view of the structure alone is testimony to the author’s brilliance. Like many Hebrew poems, the translated version obscures the nuanced form that is evident only in the original Hebrew.
- b. Dr David Eckman and Professor Brian Morgan have discussed the historical context of the author as being after Israel’s exile, when the author returned to Jerusalem and took stock of how the curses listed in God’s Covenant with Israel had fallen upon the nation. Here are some of Dr Eckman’s and Professor Morgan’s thoughts:
 - i. Though the author is now back in “the Land of Promise” and is aware of his own righteous longings, he is afraid he cannot live up to God’s requirements in the Law. He is afraid that his heart will become wayward as Israel’s had become leading up to the exile. Worse, while the author’s heart wants to remain true, Israel’s new leaders being blessed with material prosperity and regional power have already fallen away from serving God and really wanting little to do with the righteous longings the author feels.
 - ii. The author’s message is unpopular with the leaders, and the prospect of a renewed return of the curses promised in the Covenant produces great turmoil for the author. In the midst of this distressing time and situation, the author writes with emotional vulnerability and spiritual clarity. He is brutally honest about the state of his own soul, his desire for intimacy with God, his doubts about his own endurance in light of the leaders developing apostasy, his uneasiness about actually living righteously before God, and his fears about the enemy within [his Fallen nature] and without [leadership’s apostasy and spiritual oppression]. The standard formula of the Old Covenant of “do this and you shall live” did not work for this saint. The author longed for more than what the leaders had settled for in terms of their spiritual life. For this psalmist, knowing Scripture was the key to opening a love affair with the living God who beckoned to him.
 - iii. This honest vulnerability before God produced a freedom to think in new ways to

approach God and to understand eternal life. In many ways, he is a man not unlike King David. Working through the Pentateuch with Deuteronomy as the starting point for his vocabulary and theology, he takes the old expressions of Law and life and invests them with new meaning in anticipation of the New Covenant.

- iv. The result is a prophetic journey from the past into the new, with a new and exciting understanding of his own relationship with the Living God. It is a journey of personal spiritual transformation.

3. LITERARY THEME AND STRUCTURE:

- a. Psalm 119 is an “alphabetic acrostic” Psalm, meaning each verse begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet starting with the first and concluding with the last. Therefore, there are 22 Strophes comprised of 8 verses each. This is a clever artistic element only visible in the original language. Psalm 119 is further explained on Wikipedia Online Encyclopedia as follows:
 - i. This psalm is one of about a dozen alphabetic acrostic poems in the Bible. Its 176 verses are divided into 22 Strophes, one for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet; within each Strophe, each of the 8 verses begins (in Hebrew) with that letter. The name of God (Yahweh/Jehovah) appears 24 times.
 - ii. Employed in every Strophe except one, the Beth Strophe vs 9-16, of the psalm is a synonym for the Torah; of those Strophes, every line of the poem contains either the word torah (25 times) or its synonym. [see the 8 words employed in section ‘b’ below.]
 - iii. The acrostic form and the use of the Torah words constitute the framework for an elaborate prayer. The grounds for the prayer are established in the first two Strophes (*alef* and *beth*): The Torah is held up as a source of blessing and right conduct, and the psalmist pledges to dedicate himself to the law. The prayer proper begins in the third stanza (*gimel*, v. 17). Like many other psalms, this prayer includes dramatic lament (e.g. verses 81–88), joyous praise (e.g. verses 45–48) and prayers for life, deliverance and vindication (e.g. verses 132–134). What makes Psalm 119 unique is the way that these requests are continually and explicitly grounded in the gift of the Torah and the psalmist's determined loyalty to it.
 - iv. The first and fifth verses in a stanza often state the same theme followed by a statement of opposition, affliction or conflict, and the final (eighth) verse tends to be a transition introducing the next stanza. Several dozen prayers are incorporated into the Psalm, e.g. "Open my eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of your law." Themes include opposition by man, affliction, delight in the law and the goodness of God, which sometimes run into each other: "I know, O Lord, that your rules are righteous, and that in faithfulness you have afflicted

me" (v. 75), or "If your law had not been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction" (v. 92). The Psalmist at times seems to appeal to God's sovereignty, "inclining his heart to the law" in contrast to the Psalmist saying "I incline my heart." Thus, God as sovereign is invoked in v.36 "Incline my heart to your testimonies", while the Psalmist also takes personal responsibility in v. 112, "I incline my heart to perform your statutes forever." It ends with an appeal to God to seek his servant who strayed.

- b. According to Zondervan's Expository Commentary and Professor Brian Morgan, the author employs eight different words for God's law in writing Psalm 119; and at least one is used in every line. These specific words have a particular emphasis for the requirements of one who would follow God's will and purpose for their life, including:
- i. "Law" [*torah*] – occurs 25 times. In the broadest sense torah refers to any instruction that derives from God's self-revelation that forms the basis for an acceptable life and Godly action. In a narrower sense, torah is understood to be the Law of Moses – comprised of the Pentateuch, the first 5 books of Scripture.
 - ii. "Word" [*dabar*] – Is any word or declaration that proceeds from God. This is more of a general designation for all divine revelation.
 - iii. "Laws" [*mishpatim*] – refers to particular "legal issues" or "case laws" that form the basis for Israel's legal system. These would be interpretations and decrees offered by priests and rabbis, with God as the Great Judge.
 - iv. "Statutes" [*eduth/edoth*] – means "witness," or "testimony" and is often used in reference to God's covenant. Obedience to the "statutes" of the Lord signifies an individual's loyalty to the terms of the covenant between God and Israel.
 - v. "Commands" [*mitswah/mitswoth*] – is frequently a designation for anything that the Lord has required under Israel's covenantal relationship with YAWEH.
 - vi. "Decrees" [*huqqim*] – is derived from the root word meaning to "engrave" or to "inscribe." God reveals his royal sovereignty by establishing his divine will both in nature and in the covenant community.
 - vii. "Precepts" [*piqqudim*] – this term occurs only in the book of Psalms and it appears to be synonymous with "covenant" and with the revelation of God. This root emphasizes that God has the authority to determine the relationship between the speaker and the object.
 - viii. "Promise" [*imrah*] – seems to refer to anything God has spoken, commanded, or promised.
- c. Psalm 119 – also known as "The Joy of God's Law in Distress" – is comprised of twenty-two Strophes named after the letters of the Hebrew alphabet:
- i. The Aleph Strophe 119:1-8)
 - ii. The Beth Strophe 119:9-16
 - iii. The Gimel Strophe 119:17-24

iv. The Daleth Strophe	119:25-32
v. The He Strophe	119:33-40
vi. The Waw Strophe	119:41-48
vii. The Zayin Strophe	119:49-56
viii. The Heth Strophe	119:57-64
ix. The Teth Strophe	119:65-72
x. The Yodh Strophe	119:73-80
xi. The Kaph Strophe	119:71-88
xii. The Lamedh Strophe	119:89-96
xiii. The Mem Strophe	119:97-104
xiv. The Nun Strophe	119:105-112
xv. The Samekh Strophe	119:113-120
xvi. The Ayin Strophe	119:121-128
xvii. The Pe Strophe	119:129-136
xviii. The Tsadhe Strophe	119:137-144
xix. The Qoph Strophe	119:145-152
xx. The Resh Strophe	119:153-160
xxi. The Sin and Shin Strophe	119:161-168
xxii. The Taw Strophe	119:169-176

4. BIBLICAL EXEGESIS:

a. **Alph Strophe** – Jim Ziegler helps interpret Ps 119:1-8 as “The Ideal and the Real” – this Strophe sets forth the ideal... that of a man who longs to keep God’s commandments firmly in his heart so he can walk with God as did Enoch of old. However, he runs into the real – he feels inadequate because he knows his past experiences of failure.

i. ^{Ps 119:1} Blessed are they whose ways are blameless,
who walk according to the law of the LORD.

^{Ps 119:2} Blessed are they who keep his statutes
and seek him with all their heart.

^{Ps 119:3} They do nothing wrong;
they walk in his ways.

His state of being – is blessed.

His character before God – is righteous.

1a – His way: is blameless – complete, whole

2a – His heart: he has chosen to place himself under the teaching of God.

2b – His heart: careful attention has been given to the prompting of the Lord.

He is not a legalist seeking rules to follow; but a love relationship with the God who is behind the Torah and revealed by it.

1b – His ways: he chooses God’s Way, and avoids the evil way.

- ii. Ps 119:4 You have laid down [Your] precepts
that are to be fully obeyed.

His recognition of God's requirements – his "fear of God" [awe, wonder, reverence] motivates him toward exceptional obedience.

Ps 119:5 Oh, that my ways were steadfast
in obeying your decrees!

His state of being – is inadequate... 'Oh' means "I wish it were so, but it is not."

- iii. Ps 119:6 Then I would not be put to shame
when I consider all your commands.

Ps 119:7 [Then] I will praise you with an upright heart
as I learn your righteous laws.

Ps 119:8a [Then] I will obey your decrees;

He describes his yearnings for Godly [righteous] character:

1. Yearning to study without the shame of past failures.
2. Yearning for worship without hypocrisy.
3. Desiring that his worship would be the thankful expressions for genuine changes in his life.
4. Yearning to obey the Spirit of the Law... the permanent, eternal realities that underlie the Law.

Ps 119:8b Do not utterly forsake me.

His petition for God's Grace – knowing he cannot comply with God's Holy requirements, he solicits God's for His Grace to walk with him, teach him, and strengthen him.

- b. **The Gimel Strophe – Brad Baldwin helps interpret Ps 119:17-24 as "My Enemy, My Friend" – the first Strophe introduces the first two subjects in this Psalm – God and the Psalmist. The second Strophe introduces the third subject – suffering. While suffering brings alienation, it doesn't destroy him. In fact, suffering is an instrument that places the Word of God into his heart. Think along the lines of Job in this matter.**

- i. Ps 119:17 Do good to your servant,
[That] I will live; and obey your word.

Ps 119:18 Open my eyes that I may see
wonderful things in your law.

The author expresses his freedom to petition God for Grace.

1. A1 – the old command – "obey and live."
2. B1 – the new petition – "give me life so I may keep your Word." This is a tacit admission of a depraved [fallen] will.
3. A2 – the old command – "you shall bind these words between your eyes" (Deut 6:8).
4. B2 – the new petition – "open my eyes, because I'm spiritually blind."

- ii. Ps 119:19 I am a stranger on earth;
do not hide your commands from me.
Ps 119:20 My soul is consumed with longing
for your laws at all times.

An identity change caused by the tension introduced by the enemy:

1. **A1 – The external condition – the author finds he’s alienated in his own land.**
2. **B1 – His need – an intimate revelation... he feels like Adam hidden in the Garden alienated from God.**
3. **A2 – His internal condition – his soul has an increased appetite for the Word because of the contempt and external pressures he feels.**
4. **B2 – His need – for God to act again in judgment against his oppressors [internal and external] to free him.**

- iii. Ps 119:21 You rebuke the arrogant, who are cursed
and who stray from your commands.
Ps 119:22 Remove from me scorn and contempt,
for I keep your statutes.

This expresses a new confidence in God’s justice.

1. **A1 – a new confidence that the wicked will be judged because of God’s Holiness, thus no further petition will be needed.**
2. **B1 – the basis for his confidence is because they have wandered from God’s commandments.**
3. **A2 – a new confidence that the righteous will be vindicated.**
4. **B2 – the basis for his confidence is that it matters to God when such as the author purpose to do what pleases God by keeping His commandments.**

- iv. Ps 119:23 Though rulers sit together and slander me,
your servant will meditate on your decrees.
Ps 119:24 Your statutes are my delight;
they are my counselors.

What is being expressed is a new internal joy resulting from victory over the enemies:

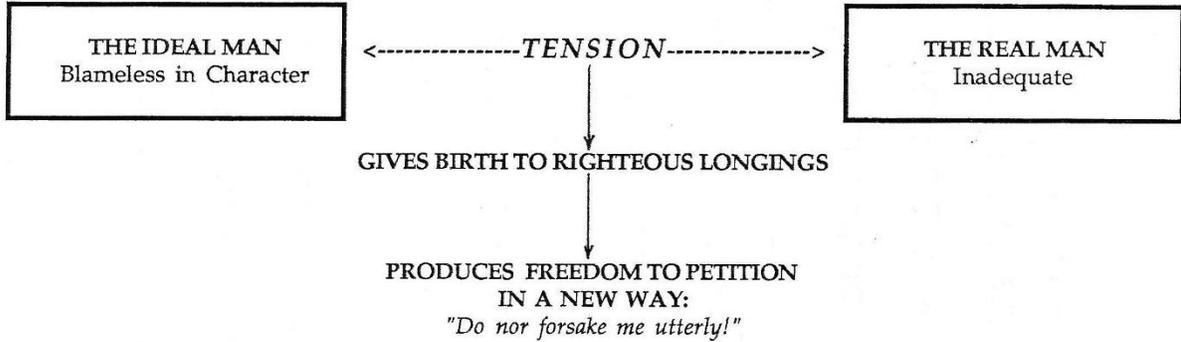
1. **A1 – His external condition – tension and oppression of the one against the many.**
2. **B1 – His refuge – he seeks mediation in God’s Law.**
3. **A2 – His internal condition – He is confident because his soul is delighted by the many statutes of the Word.**
4. **B2 – His refuge – The many statutes of the Word brings counsel to the one, and will overcome the many enemies.**

- c. **Diagram of the themes of the Aleph and Gimel Strophes – Professor Brian Morgan:**

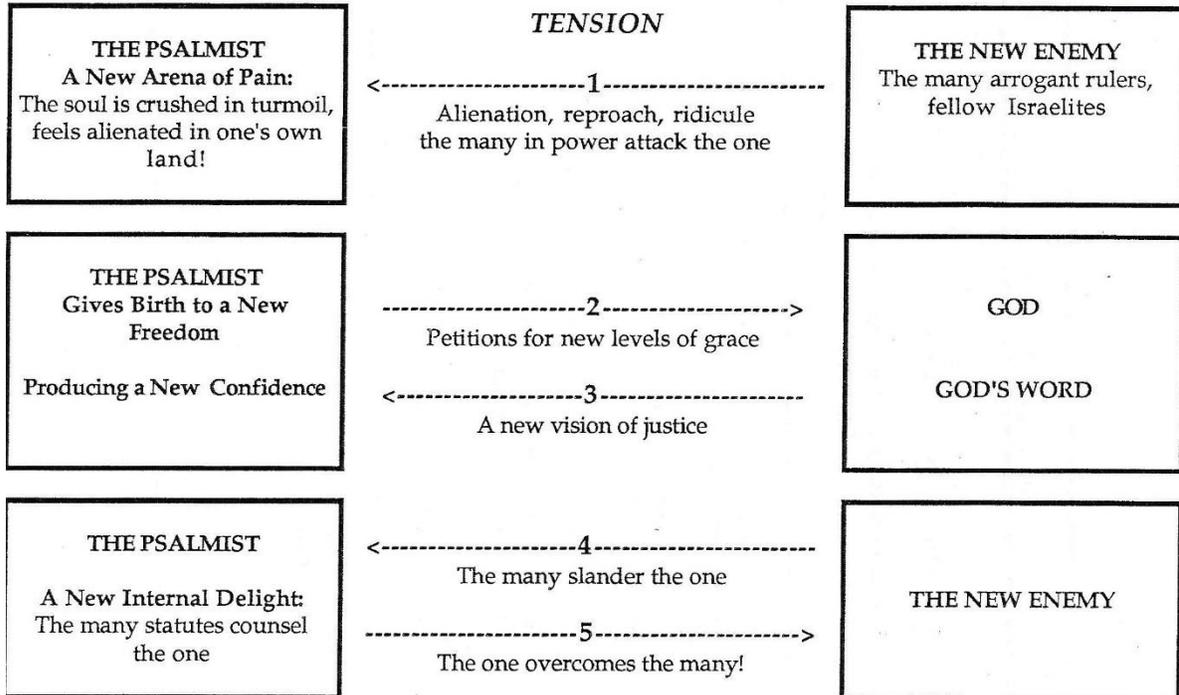
Bible Survey - OT 14.4-119 – Psalms 119



Aleph: THE IDEAL AND THE REAL
PSALM 119:1-8



Gimel: MY ENEMY, MY FRIEND!
PSALM 119:17-24



- d. The He Strophe – The Psalmist here states that he sees God as the causative factor of everything. Righteous longings provide the basis for hope on the wings of personal vulnerability and the expectation that God desires to act on our behalf. Because of this,

we can rely on God to be our causative agent of change [transformation = God making us something more than we can accomplish on our own]. Ten imperatives are listed for a disciplined approach to learning, and a disciplined approach to life. The imperatives are underlined:

- i. Ps 119:33 Teach me, O LORD, to follow your decrees;
then I will keep them to the end.
Ps 119:34 Give me understanding, and I will keep your law
and obey it with all my heart.
Ps 119:35 Direct me in the path of your commands,
for there I find delight.

Petitions for Discipleship in Learning – “Teach me”

- 1. A1 – The petition – direct discipleship in righteous living.**
 - 2. B1 – The goal – To adhere to the Law faithfully his whole life.**
 - 3. A2 – The petition – discernment.**
 - 4. B2 – The goal – to not merely be obedient to keep the Law fully from his heart’s desire.**
 - 5. A3 – The petition – constant, direct supervision to guide him.**
 - 6. C1 – his basis for the petition – his righteous longings.**
- ii. Ps 119:36 Turn my heart (a)toward your statutes
and (b)not toward selfish gain.
Ps 119:37 Turn my eyes away from worthless things;
preserve my life according to your word.
Ps 119:38 Fulfill your promise to your servant,
so that you may be feared.
Ps 119:39 Take away the disgrace I dread,
for your laws are good.
Ps 119:40 How I long for your precepts!
Preserve my life in your righteousness.

Petitions for Discipleship in Living – “Receive me”

- 1. A1 – The petition – a Spiritual appetite for God’s Word.**
- 2. B1 – The danger – our fallen nature drifting toward greed and compromise.**
- 3. A2 – The petition – direct intervention to give him eternal life.**
- 4. B2 – The danger – our fallen nature is inclined toward lust which is destructive to his love relationship with God.**
- 5. A3 – The petition – God will fulfill His promise in the author’s experience.**
- 6. B3 – a heart which is too easily tempted to take God lightly.**
- 7. A4 – The petition – direct intervention to save his reputation.**
- 8. B4 – The danger – the author can’t deliver himself from the danger and flood of evil before him, he needs supernatural Grace.**

9. **A5** – The petition – direct intervention to give him eternal life.
 10. **C2** – The basis for the petition – though he knows he has righteous longings; he knows they are insufficient to keep him on track. The plea to have God preserve his life is the realization that eternal life is necessarily a gift of Grace through God’s Character, not his own.
- e. **The Teth Strophe** – in this Strophe the author redefines what is “good in life” as “Living on the Wings of Redemption.” Through suffering the psalmist learned that the Goodness of God [being disciple by Him] is better than anything earth has to offer [the material blessing in the Land of the Old Covenant]. This insight into reality, leads the psalmist to anticipate a new and better Covenant.
- i. ^{Ps 119:65} Do good to your servant [“Good you have done with your servant”] according to your word, O LORD.
^{Ps 119:66} Teach me knowledge and good judgment,
for I believe in your commands.
^{Ps 119:67} Before I was afflicted I went astray,
but now I obey your word.
^{Ps 119:68} You are good, and what you do is good;
teach me your decrees.

These verses are petitions for the Goodness of God to be expressed anew:

1. **A1** – Vs 65 – The psalmist states his understanding of the Good God has already done for the psalmist, in anticipation of a greater Good to come.
 2. **B1** – Vs 66 – The psalmist requests for Word discipleship [the Goodness of God] to be expressed:
 - a. **1a** – The request – teach me internal discernment.
 - b. **1b** – The basis of the request – the psalmist’s trust.
 3. **A2** – Vs 67 – His own experience of suffering has opened his eyes to a new understanding of God and Good:
 - a. **2a** – Vs 67a – The past without affliction – he strayed away.
 - b. **2b** – Vs 67b – The present with affliction – he draws close and keeps God’s Word.
 4. **B2** – Vs 68 – his request for the goodness of God:
 - a. **2b** – Vs 68a – The basis for the request – the Character of God [not the author’s goodness or worthiness].
 - b. **2a** – Vs 68b – The request – continue to disciple me.
- ii. ^{Ps 119:69} Though the arrogant have smeared me with lies,
I keep your precepts with all my heart.
^{Ps 119:70} Their hearts are callous and unfeeling,
but I delight in your law.

The psalmist has experienced God’s Goodness in the midst of evil:

1. **A1 – Vs 69a – The actions of the arrogant – deceitful lies about the psalmist’s character.**
 2. **A2 – Vs 69b – The psalmist’s actions – to honor God by fully obeying God’s Laws.**
 3. **B1 – Vs 70a – The heart of the wicked – fattened by sin, hard and impenetrable. When you are full of yourself, there is little room or care for God.**
 4. **B2 – Vs 70b – The heart of the psalmist – delights in God’s Word.**
- iii. ^{Ps 119:71} It was good for me to be afflicted
so that I might learn [be taught] your decrees.
^{Ps 119:72} The law from your mouth is more precious to me
than thousands of pieces of silver and gold.
- Renewed praise for the Goodness of God:**
1. **A – Vs 71 – The goodness of God – [to be disciple by God] is better than an easy life of self-indulgence. Thus, suffering and affliction were the means to gain a pliant and teachable heart. Note that God is directly discipling him, it is not through a priest.**
 2. **B – Vs 72 – The Goodness of God – [to be disciplined by God] gives an internal wealth that is far superior to earthly riches. He is now willing to endure poverty in favor of experiencing and enjoying God.**
- f. **The Ooph Strophe – builds upon the theme of suffering and adds how it results in the experiential nature of prayer in communion with God. The psalmist has learned there are four steps in empowered prayer: 1) calling out with his whole heart, 2) wait for God’s response in eager anticipation, 3) calling out again with renewed confidence, 4) he sees his answer... it is more than an answer, it is the Lord Himself coming and meeting with him. This is analogous to Jesus praying to the Father in the Garden.**
- i. ^{Ps 119:145} I call with all my heart; answer me, O LORD,
and I will obey your decrees.
^{Ps 119:146} I call out to you; save me
and I will keep your statutes.
- IA – I Call:**
1. **The intensity of the call – my whole heart.**
 2. **The need of the call – an attentive Lord who brings salvation.**
 3. **The goal of the call – obedience – there is no obedience possible without an act of salvation and Grace. Being a “better person” is not enough. He needs a fundamental transformation from within.**
- ii. ^{Ps 119:147} I rise before dawn and cry for help;
I have put my hope in your word.
^{Ps 119:148} My eyes stay open through the watches of the night,

that I may meditate on your promises.

IIA – I anticipate the answer to my call:

1. **At Dawn – I rise, I wait – again this is not legalist, this is a person who has experienced God and loves Him. He rises early and waits expectantly in eager anticipation.**
2. **At Dusk – looks forward to the “night watches” as an opportunity to meditate on God’s Word. Groups were vulnerable at night to predators, raiders, or bandits. Though necessary, no one looked forward to being awakened in the middle of the night to take their turn at watch. This saint found these as an opportunity to meditate on God’s Word... an example of his zeal for time with God.**

- iii. ^{Ps 119:149} Hear my voice in accordance with your love;
preserve my life, O LORD, according to your laws.

IB – I repeat my call with renewed confidence:

1. **The heed of the call – an attentive Lord who loves him and brings eternal life.**
2. **The basis of the call – God’s Loyal Love [Hessed] – while commonly used in reference to God’s covenant making relationship with the nation of Israel, here it is used in a personal sense rather than a national sense. God is loyal to all people who love Him, follow Him, obey Him, and serve Him. This is definitely a precursor to the New Covenant in Messiah Jesus.**

- iv. ^{Ps 119:150} Those who devise wicked schemes are near,
but they are far from your law.

^{Ps 119:151} Yet you are near, O LORD,
and all your commands are true.

^{Ps 119:152} Long ago I learned from your statutes
that you established them to last forever.

IIB – My eyes of faith see the answer to my call:

1. **Evil is near – The sources of evil serve to intensify his call; but because they are far from God and far from His Word, they have no stability or lasting power.**
2. **God is near – this alone provides stability and security. Because of who God is, everything He says must stand... this is the nature of Hessed.**
3. **That Life comes from another source and time – and it endures for all time.**

5. THEOLOGICAL CONCLUSIONS:

- a. **The structure of Psalm 119 reinforces its theological content, which is the all-pervasive and all-encompassing nature of the Torah. Creation itself is a demonstration of the pervasive impact of God and His Word, and humanity is well advised to know and submit**

to God's Word.

- b. The Psalm can be over-whelming in its focus, but that is the point. To know God, you must know His Word; to love God, you must love His Word. To experience God, you must be disciplined by God's Word. To be disciplined by God is the most wonderful thing imaginable.
- c. Every word of Psalm 119:1 occurs in either Psalm 1 or 19. Psalm 1 is another Torah Psalm; Psalm 19 is a hybrid Creation-Torah Psalm.
- d. Being "blameless" is not moral perfection, it is being accepted by God. Being "happy" or "joyful" is not an emotional high, it's an informed contented response to knowing you are accepted by God. Happiness is a response that is not incompatible with the persecution or scorn a believer may experience, in fact persecution and oppression are vehicles that drive us into prayerful dependence upon God. Being blameless and happy has everything to do with orienting one's life to seeking God, to being instructed by God, and to be disciplined by God.
- e. Psalms 1, 19, and 119 seek to integrate general revelation, specific revelation, and personal transformation. Choosing to live in reliance upon the Lord is everything; God's revelation in nature and Scripture is consistent in emphasizing our need to rely on God. To do otherwise is seen as foolish. Discovering God in the intimacy of discipleship in all of its forms was the heart's desire of the psalmist who wrote Psalm 119, and he wrote so thoroughly and convincingly to encourage his readers through the ages of redemptive history to do likewise.
- f. J. Clinton McCann Jr in his book [A Theological Introduction to the Book of Psalms](#) observes that, "God has to do with all of life, and all of life has to do with God... even life's worst... even a cross. God is involved; God is with us." He then writes that, "We are simultaneously confronted and comforted, and comforted again by our own finitude and fallibility; and comforted [anew] by the good news of God's faithful love and grace. The agony and the ecstasy belong together. We are people both of the Cross and of the Resurrection, at one and the same time." I think the psalmist of Psalm 119 would agree... as he foresaw the New Covenant in the uncomfortable and imperfect times of the early years after the exile. Upon return to the Land, the psalmist found that the was still broken, and the heart of God's people was as well... still needing redemption and reconciliation; something that all of humanity would wait impatiently for until Messiah Jesus' sacrifice and triumph on the Cross and Resurrection. However, something that all of Creation awaits still is Jesus Second Advent at the End of the Age when Creation will be perfected. For more on the apocalypse and End Times see the AD article on Eschatology - <http://www.authenticdiscipleship.org/pdfs/1-biblical-literacy/Bible%20Survey%20-%20Apocalyptic%201.3%20-%20Eschatology,%20Millenianism%20&%20the%20Rapture.pdf>