



SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Psalm 119:1-176

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven.
Thy faithfulness is unto all generations: thou hast
established the earth, and it abideth.”
(Psalm 119:89-90)

BACKGROUND

Psalm 119, often referred to as “The Great Psalm,” is the longest chapter in the Bible; it contains 176 verses. The author is unknown, but most Bible scholars credit it either to David or the prophet Jeremiah, based upon textual references to kings, reproach, enemies, etc. Dating the psalm’s composition to the time of the Babylonian captivity would point toward Jeremiah as the author; however, the context allows for an earlier date as well, making David’s authorship a possibility that must also be considered.

In the original Hebrew, Psalm 119 is presented in the form of an acrostic, or alphabetical writing. While it is one of several acrostics in the Book of Psalms (others are Psalms 9 and 10 combined, along with Psalms 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, and 145), this is the longest and most intricate of these compositions. There are twenty-two letters in the Hebrew alphabet, and Psalm 119 is divided into twenty-two, eight-verse sections. Each of these twenty-two sections is prefaced with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. In the original Hebrew, that letter begins the first word of each of the eight verses within the section.

The clear theme of Psalm 119 is the Law of the Lord and its vital ministry in the spiritual life of believers. The word translated *law* is *torah*—a word which has a much broader meaning in Hebrew than in English. It refers to the will of God as it was made known to Israel, and has the sense of “teaching” or “instruction.” A unique feature of this psalm is that all but a very few of the verses contain at least one reference to the Law of the Lord. The multifaceted manner in which the truths regarding God’s instruction are presented reflects the importance of integrating Scripture into every part of life and community.

QUESTIONS

1. What words describing the Law of the Lord are used in the first section, titled Aleph? (Psalm 119:1-8)

2. In Psalm 119:2, the psalmist stated that those who seek God with their “whole heart” will be blessed. Contemporary thinking views the heart as the seat of emotions. However, in the Bible the word *heart* is a far more comprehensive term which encompasses three key aspects of who we are: the intellect, the emotions, and the will. Given that description, what do you think embracing the Word with our “whole heart” might look like in everyday life?

3. In Psalm 119:11, the psalmist stated, “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.” How will hiding the Word in our hearts help us not to sin?

4. During the period of history when the psalms were composed, history and religious traditions were passed on orally. For this reason, devotional truths were often presented through music (as with many of the psalms) or as an acrostic (as with Psalm 119), as these methods promoted memorization and retention of God’s Word among the Hebrew people. What are some strategies that can help us memorize passages from the Bible?

5. The word “delight” (or “delights”) is found nine times in Psalm 119, where it is used both as a verb (for example, in verse 16) and a noun (as in verse 24). In what specific circumstances has the Word of God been a delight in your life?

6. The old English word *quicken* in verse 25 is derived from a verb form of the Hebrew *hayah*, which literally means “to give life; to revive or restore life.” How is the Word of God instrumental in quickening or reviving our hearts even after we have been saved?

7. In Psalm 119:36, the psalmist indicated that having a heart inclined toward God’s Word would be a defense against covetousness. How would you define the word “covetousness” as used in this verse, and how do you think a focus upon God’s Word would be a protection against such an attitude?

8. Relativism is a philosophical position that is popular in contemporary society. It asserts that knowledge, truth, and morality exist only in relation to culture, society, or historical context, and are not absolute. How does Psalm 119:160 refute this position? Why is the timeless nature of God’s Word so comforting to believers?

CONCLUSION

We should embrace the encouragements in Psalm 119 and take note of the dire dangers of neglecting the Word of God—the most important foundation for our lives.

NOTES
