

# The Word on the Word Series: 1

## Psalm 119

### Introductory Thoughts on Psalm 119

In this introduction to Psalm 119 we are going to see a number of different things that make this psalm truly unique and a great blessing to us. I call this psalm “The Word on the Word” - it is what God says about His own Word.

### **The Longest Psalm**

Psalm 119 stands as the giant among the Psalms, it is the longest psalm and the longest chapter in the Bible with 176 verses. But, don't let the length of the chapter hinder you. It is written in a format that will allow us to read and study the key concepts with ease.

- Because the Book of Psalms is the longest book in the Bible, it shows us the priority of praise and worship to God. The vast majority of the psalms are written as songs and prayers.
- And since Psalm 119 is the longest psalm in the Bible, it shows us the priority of God's Word to God, that is the importance that God places on His own word. David writes in Psalm 138.2b “.. *For You have magnified Your word above all Your name*“
- Not only does the Book of Psalms contain the longest chapter in the Bible it also has the shortest.

### **Authorship**

- The author of Psalm 119 is unknown. Some scholars think it was King David. Others think it might have been Ezra, the prophet. Others think it is a compilation of the work of many writers, possibly written for a king.
- When it was written is as much a mystery as to who wrote it. Depending on who the author is, we can deduce that Psalm 119 was written somewhere between 2400 and 3000 years ago.

### **Acrostic**

The psalm is an acrostic or alphabetic psalm.

- It is comprised of 22 stanzas, each starting with a different letter in the Hebrew alphabet. Each stanza has 8 verses with two lines each (couplet).
- The first eight couplets begin with aleph (= A), the next eight with beth (= B), etc. Depending on how you count, only two to three of the couplets (90?, 122, and 132) lack a direct reference to the written Word of God through some synonym such as law, testimonies, statutes, etc. (the essence of verse 90 is about God establishing the world through His Word)
- Although there are some obvious themes running through the psalm, the overall structure seems to be determined mostly by the alphabetic arrangement. It is the A to Z of God's Word. C.H Spurgeon called it the Golden Alphabet

### **Used for Worship**

Psalm 119 is a prayer that includes many different elements, including prayers of

- praise (45-48)

- lament (81-88)
- vindication (132-134)
- obedience (57-64)
- and petitions for wisdom (33-40)

### Focus on Word of God

- The purpose of this Psalm is to celebrate God's word and instruction to his people. In it the Psalmist beautifully expresses awe and adoration of God for His word.
- As we have seen, the focus of the entire psalm is on The Word of God. There are only two or three verses which do not make a direct reference to the Word of God (vs 90?, 122, 132). As we study Psalm 119 we will see how its' reliability, accuracy, authority, necessity and sufficiency allows us to find out what the Bible says about itself.
- It will allow us to dig deeper into the Word of God and find out how it applies to daily life.
- It will also allow us to read and pray the Word of God together.

This psalm uses 9 different words for God's law. The psalm uses the full meaning of these words to elaborate on The Word of God.

**Law** - Generally, refers to the first 5 books of the Old Testament – the Torah.

**Testimonies** - God's standard of conduct according to the 10 commandments. His testimonies are His witnesses that attest to His character and will.

**Way (or Ways)** - The pattern of life required by God's law – (used in vs 3, 37)

**Precepts** - A commandment or requirement, instructions given to men to direct their conduct.

**Statutes (or Ordinances)** - Enacted laws and decrees, but not confined to the written Law

**Commandments** - Orders; God's decrees

**Judgements (or Rules)** - A binding law; judicial decision

**Word ( or Words)** – God's spoken or written utterances, His sayings, a general term of God's revelation

**Promise, (Promises)** – The Hebrew word '*imrah*' is used 19 times in this psalm (11, 38, 41, 50, 58, 67, 76, 82, 103, 116, 123, 133, 140, 148, 154, 158, 162, 170, 172) and means a spoken utterance, however this word is most commonly translated 'word'

Many of the verses mention God's Word in one line, and then in the second line of the couplet connect it to God's revelation.

Examples:

**vs 11** "Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You"

**vs 67** "Before I was afflicted I went astray, But now I keep Your word"

David Powlison observes, "Psalm 119 is actually not about the topic of getting Scripture into your life. Instead, it is the honest words that erupt when what God says gets into you. It's not an exhortation to Bible study; it's an outcry of faith..." (*Speaking the Truth in Love*, p 14).