

Psalm 119 א

Notes by Nate Wilson

INTRODUCTION

Fantastic example of Hebrew acrostic poetry. 22 stanzas corresponding to the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Each stanza has 8 verses which all begin with the same letter. Each verse has two parallel statements. Psalmist unknown, but maybe in an oppressive environment which is trying his faith.

אֲשֶׁרִי תְּמִימֵי דֶרֶךְ הַהֲלָכִים בַּתּוֹרַת יְהוָה: 1

Happy the perfect of way, the ones who walk in the Torah of Jehovah

(Webster/KJV) Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD.

(ASV) Blessed are they that are perfect in the way, Who walk in the law of Jehovah.

(NASB) How blessed are those whose way is blameless, Who walk in the law of the LORD.

(LXX) Ἀλληλουια.. Μακάριοι οἱ ἄμωμοι ἐν ὁδῷ οἱ πορευόμενοι ἐν νόμῳ κυρίου.

(Brenton) Alleluia. Blessed are the blameless in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord.

(NIV) Blessed are they whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the LORD.

- Relationship to Beatitudes "Blessed are..."
- Ashar vs. barak according to Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament: Ashar is related to "happy" Ashar has to do with being in an enviable position due to having done the right things. Baruch is a parallel, but ashar is used to describe men, never to describe God.
- You want to be happy/blessed? Here's what to do!
- Torah/law is "instruction" particularly from the Pentateuch. It is the guidelines our God gave for his covenant relationship. Jewish commentators write that "torah" literally means "teaching/direction" and indicates the legal system - the whole will of God imparted to man for guidance.
- Inability to keep the law perfectly - need for Jesus.

אֲשֶׁרִי נֹצְרֵי עֲדָתִי בְּכָל־לֵב יִדְרְשׁוּהוּ: 2

Happy are those guarding His testimonies, with all the heart they seek Him.

(ASV) Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, (KJV, Web + "and") That seek him with the whole heart.

(NASB) How blessed are those who observe His testimonies, Who seek Him with all *their* heart.

(LXX) μακάριοι οἱ ἐξερευνῶντες τὰ μαθήματα αὐτοῦ ἐν ὅλῃ καρδίᾳ ἐκζητήσουσιν αὐτόν.

(Brenton) Blessed are they that search out his testimonies: they will diligently seek him with the whole heart.

(NIV) Blessed are they who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart.

- Keep/observe from natar-to guard as in a military watch
- Seek - darash - indicates repeated motion - to "keep coming back to"
- Testimony: from that which is round or repeated, indicating constancy. In covenant context, it is the things which bear witness to the enduring quality of God's covenant: the tabernacle (Ex.38:21), the ark, and its contents - esp the Decalogue (Ex.25:21-22). In the NT, the word "testimony/witness" is connected with backing up the truth of the Gospel through the lives of Christians. Jewish commentators write that "testimony" indicates the rules of conduct which attest to the divine will. Albert Barnes, 19th Century Commentator: "Every law of God is His solemn testimony of what is right and good."
- Hebrew parallelism: Keeping the testimonies is equated with seeking Him!

אִם לֹא־פִעְלוּ עוֹלָה בְּדַרְכָּיו הַלְכוּ: 3

Also they don't do injustice, they walk in His ways.

(Webster/KJV) They also do no iniquity: they walk in his ways.

(ASV) Yea, they do no unrighteousness; They walk in his ways.

(NASB) They also do no unrighteousness; They walk in His ways.

(LXX) οὐ γὰρ οἱ ἐργαζόμενοι τὴν ἀνομίαν ἐν ταῖς ὁδοῖς αὐτοῦ ἐπορεύθησαν.

(Brenton) For they that work iniquity have not walked in his ways.

(NIV) X They do nothing wrong; they walk in his ways,

- Owlah = injustice/unrighteousness/wrong - opposite of God's character (Deut. 32:4 Ascribe greatness to our God the Rock ... without injustice...) opposite of righteous. Includes partiality in judgment (Lev. 19:15), dishonest trade dealings (Deut. 25:16), robbery (Ezek. 33:15), murder (II Sam 3:34), oppression (Hab 2:12), vicious words (Job 6:30). Man may put it away (Job 11:14), not be envious of those who do it (Ps. 37:1), renounce it (Job.34:32), and seek God's deliverance (Ps 43:1).
- This doesn't mean that they never ever sin, but that it is their habitual, characteristic practice to avoid injustice. (I John 3:9)
- Derek = way - has to do with "setting foot on" something - thus a road or path, and metaphorically a person's behavior. Jehovah's ways are written in the Bible - His character traits and repeated actions. This is not as explicit in terms of "do's" and "don't's" but is more relational - patterning ourselves after the nature of our God. This extends well beyond the Pentateuch, because we see God's actions throughout history and even personally in the tenure of His Son on earth. "What would Jesus do?" is a good question to ask to find the "way" of God, but it must not be what we would IMAGINE Him doing, but what we see that He actually did in the Bible. Better "What DID/DOES Jesus do?" than "What WOULD Jesus do?"
- These ways are not something we walk out as far to the edge of as we can or that we stay off of and happen to step into on occasion, but are where we habitually and characteristically walk. This means avoiding ways that we know will lead us away from God's ways (There are two ways I can drive home: one goes by the community pool, the other doesn't. I chose the one that doesn't because I know that is a path that can lead my mind down the path away from God.) We are always watching God, taking our cues from Him, and mimicking His ways. ILLUSTRATION: My two-year-old daughter mimicking everything her older sister does.

אתה צויתך בקדיך לשמר מאד: 4

You Yourself commanded your precepts to keep diligently.

(Webster/KJV) Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently.

(ASV) Thou hast commanded *us* thy precepts, *That we should observe* them diligently.

(NASB) Thou hast ordained Thy precepts, *That we should keep them* diligently.

(LXX) οὐ ἐνετείλω τὰς ἐντολάς σου φυλάξασθαι σφόδρα.

(Brenton) Thou hast commanded *us* diligently to keep thy precepts.

(NIV) You have laid down precepts *that are* to be fully obeyed.

- *Commanded - based on the authority of God. This is the great difference between Christianity and the secular Humanism which rules American culture in the 21st century. We don't do things because we judge them to be beneficial to us (Humanism), but because we believe in a God who holds ultimate authority over us. We must believe this about God or we will miss the boat and not be His people.*
- *Paqad = precept - from the root meaning of a visit - when the boss shows up and tells you what to do. A particularized rule, Thing appointed, or a Charge - a responsibility that God gives His people. (Illustration: when the Pizza Inn owner showed up unexpectedly after playing golf and told me how many pepperoni's to put on a pizza.) This word only occurs in the Psalms, clearly referring back to the commands of God, but since the word doesn't occur in the Torah associated with any particular laws, it's hard to nail down any real specific meaning. It could refer to occasions where God clarified a law, such as in Lev. 24 when the half-Egyptian son of Selemuth blasphemed God's name and they inquired of God what to do, and God laid down the law "he that blasphemeth the name of Jehovah, he shall surely be put to death - even if he is a sojourner" or when the daughters of Zelophahad came to Moses about their family's dilemma of having no sons to inherit the property. In that case, God lays down the law that if a man dies and has no son, then you shall transfer his inheritance to his daughter." Those might be instances of a paqad/precept. If that is the case, then Jesus did much to expand this category of God's word by*

visiting the earth and teaching many, many precepts with authority which are recorded in the Gospels.

- Shamar-keep: not just lock away in a safe, but actively guard and watch over, tend, preserve, observe.
- Very intense sentence with intensive subject, piel verb, and the added “maod” This is surprising. You would expect this kind of passion for keeping the law to be expressed of the great fundamental laws, but in all probability, these “precepts” are not the basic 10 commandments, but rather the more “incidental” laws. Even the “little” details of the word of God should be zealously kept! Again, it’s not up to us to judge what is important and what is not; everything the Bible teaches us to do carries the weight of God’s authoritative command, and He expects obedience!

5 אַחַלִּי יִכְנוּ דַרְכֵי לְשֹׁמֵר הַקִּיּוֹד: 5

Oh that my ways could be made to stand to keep Your statutes.

(Webster/KJV) O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!

(ASV) Oh that my ways were established To observe thy statutes!

(NASB) Oh that my ways may be established To keep Thy statutes!

(LXX) ὄφελον κατευθυνθείησαν αἱ ὁδοί μου τοῦ φυλάξασθαι τὰ δικαιώματά σου.

(Brenton) O that my ways were directed to keep thine ordinances.

(NIV) Oh, that my ways were steadfast in obeying your decrees!

- חֲקֵת “a statute” NIV = “ordinance,” It comes from the root חִקַּח = “to engrave;” an important law was engraved into stone for all to see and remember. A statute engraved in stone had a permanent nature to it. ILLUSTRATION: NO TRESSPASSING sign.
 - *Laws governing the priests and temple worship:* The sin-offering (Num. 1), Sons of Aaron (Ex. 29:9), Levitical cities of refuge (Num. 35:29), priestly linen clothing (Ex. 28:43), priest’s ceremonial washing (Ex. 30:21), Levites working in temple (Lev. 24:9), priest’s meal-offerings (Lev. 6:22), priest’s duty to blow trumpets before war (Num. 10:8), priest’s duty to keep the lamps burning (Lev. 24:3), priest eating the shewbread (Lev. 24:9), offering sacrifices at altar (Lev. 17:7), and prohibition of priests drinking alcohol while on temple duty (Lev. 10:9).
 - *Feast days and Sabbaths:* First-fruits (Lev. 23:4), Pentecost (Lev. 23:21), Passover (Ex. 12:14), Unleavened Bread (Ex. 12:17), Feast of Booths (Lev. 23:41), Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:29-34), Feast of Trumpets (Num. 10:8)
 - *Cleanliness-laws for laity:* Washing with lye (water mixed with ashes) after touching a dead body (Num. 19:10-21), the prohibition against eating fat and blood in Lev. 3:17, purifying booty won in war (Num. 31:21), and the prohibition against cross-breeding (Lev. 19:19).
 - Statutes applied not only to the Jews in Israel, but also to the “sojourners” (Num. 9:14) and the “strangers” (Num. 15), so it wasn’t ethnically-bound, nor was it bound only to people who worshipped Jehovah – it applied to people of other religions from other races who were passing through the land.
 - In the Torah, countless exhortations are given to keep God’s statutes along with the commandments and ordinances. Blessings are promised to those who obey these statutes, and curses are given for disobedience.
- Yikoon - lit. “be made to stand” be established. Same verbal here as in the previous verse “to keep.” The Psalmist states outright his need for outside help to keep God’s decrees. “Be established” is a passive verb; it indicates a third party holding him up so that he can stand up and keep standing. (Jer. 10:23ff “I know O Lord that a man’s way is not in himself; nor is it in a man who walks to direct his steps. Correct me, O Lord...”) This is what God does. Not only has He set down statutes for His people to show them how to be happiest, not only has He sent His Son Jesus to fulfill all those laws and save His people from the damnation they would receive for not following all the laws perfectly, but He also sends His Spirit to live in the hearts of the people He is saving to enable them to obey His laws to a great extent and enjoy the blessings in this life that come from obeying those laws. What a wonderful God!
- If your heard echoes this cry - “Oh that I may be established” then be encouraged that God has placed that desire in your heart and His Spirit is at work in you to establish you!

6: אִז לֹא־אֲבוֹשׁ בְּהִיטִי אֶל־כָּל־מִצְוֹתֶיךָ:

Then I shall not be shamed while looking over all your commandments.

(Webster/KJV) Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect to all thy commandments.

(ASV) Then shall I not be put to shame, When I have respect unto all thy commandments.

(NASB) Then I shall not be ashamed When I look upon all Thy commandments.

(LXX) τότε οὐ μὴ ἐπαισχυθῶ ἐν τῷ με ἐπιβλέπειν ἐπὶ πάσας τὰς ἐντολάς σου.

(Brenton) Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect to all thy commandments.

(NIV) Then I would not be put to shame when I consider all your commands.

- “When I consider all” lit. “in Looking over all” - the word “when” assumes that he looks at God’s commands regularly - the verbal has more to do with gazing at something than paying homage to it as the KJV connotes, but it includes the respect that comes with paying attention to something important. (James 1:25 “But he who looks intently at the perfect law - the law of liberty - and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer, but an effectual doer, that man shall be blessed in what he does.”)
- Note also the little word “all.” He is not just looking at part of God’s word, but the whole thing. We should be reading the whole Bible regularly just like the Psalmist.
- Matzot - commands: general term for a law of God in the sphere of religious life. Everything that God has commanded to be done... like the ten COMMANDments.
- The problem is that when we start looking intently at all of God’s commands, two things will happen to us if we are honest: First we will be convicted that we have violated His commands and second we will despair of ever being able to obey all of those commands in the future. ILLUSTRATION: How do you feel when you drive past a policeman? Sometimes I feel that there are so many laws, that a police officer wanted to, he could probably find something wrong with me no matter how hard I tried to obey all the traffic laws. What makes it worse is if I know I’ve been driving over the speed limit.
- That’s why the Gospel is such Good News! There is a way out of that guilt and shame! When God forgives our past violations of His law and helps us to increasingly obey His law, we can look upon the law without fear of judgment for what we have done in the past and without fear of failure as we face a set of standards that are humanly impossible to fully obey. God deals with both of these issues - guilt, and anxiety.

7: אֹדֶךָ בַּיֶשֶׁר לִבִּי בְּלִמְדֵי מִשְׁפָּטֶיךָ צְדָקָה:

I will praise You with an upright heart when I learn (have learned?) your righteous judgments.

(Webster/KJV) I will praise thee with uprightness of heart, when I shall have learned thy righteous judgments.

(ASV/NASB) I shall (ASV sub “will”) give thanks (ASV + “un-”) to Thee with uprightness of heart, When I learn Thy righteous judgments.

(LXX) ἔξομολογήσομαί σοι, κύριε, ἐν εὐθύτητι καρδίας ἐν τῷ μεμαθηγέσθαι με τὰ κρίματα τῆς δικαιοσύνης σου.

(Brenton) I will give thee thanks with uprightness of heart, when I have learnt the judgments of thy righteousness.

(NIV) I will praise you with an upright heart as I learn your righteous laws.

- Mishpat - judgment: Decisions concerning right and wrong which give expression to and put in execution the righteousness of God (Keil & Delitzsch). Judgments generally regulate man’s relationship with his neighbor (Soncino).
- Because our country’s founders did not want to concentrate power in any one body of men, they separated our government into three branches, the Executive, Legislative, and Judicial. But God has all three powers concentrated in Him. James 4:11 says that God is both lawgiver and judge, and the one who is able to save and to destroy!
- Have you ever had that experience of reading a passage of Scripture and just being overwhelmed with how good it is and just can’t help praising God? The more you learn about God and His word, the more it makes you want to praise Him!
- Lamad - learn. This assumes that you are taking steps to keep learning. You will never reach a plateau where you won’t need to learn any more from the Scriptures - not even if you have an

M.Div! I have had a delightful time chewing on these 8 verses for days on end, and I can't exhaust their gloriousness and freshness!

את חקֵיךָ אֲשַׁמֵּר אֶל־תַּעֲזֹבֵנִי עַד־מְאֹד: 8

Your statutes I keep; Don't forsake me until much.

(Webster/KJV) I will keep (*ASV sub* "observe") thy statutes: O forsake me not utterly.

(NASB) I shall keep Thy statutes; Do not forsake me utterly!

(LXX) τὰ δικαιώματά σου φυλάξω· μή με ἐγκαταλίπῃς ἕως σφόδρα.

(Brenton) I will keep thine ordinances: O forsake me not greatly.

(NIV) I will obey your decrees; do not utterly forsake me.

- Here, "statutes" may be summarizing all of God's word as previously mentioned in this stanza.
- Confidence to make the promise to keep God's statutes is based upon the prayer that God would not leave him. Don't leave me to do this in my own strength! (parallel in v.10 - "do not let me err")

Comparison of Synonyms for the Bible:

| | | | |
|---|-----------------|---------------|--|
| 1 | v.1 | Torah | law, instruction |
| 2 | v.2 | ad | testimony, witness |
| 3 | v.3 | derek | way, road |
| 4 | v.4 | paqad | precept (authoritative visit, thing appointed, personally charged) |
| 5 | v.5, 8 | chuq | statute, engraved rule (decree, ordinance) |
| 6 | v.6 | mitzot | commands, authority |
| 7 | v.7 | mishpat | judgment, legal justice |
| 8 | v.9, 16 v.11 | devar amar | word, thing word, saying, communication |

Syntactical-Logical Flow of Aleph section

OBJECTIVE TRUTH
(3rd Person)

PERSONAL COMMAND
(2nd Person)

APPLICATION
(1st Person)

Happy the perfect of way who:

- Walks in the Torah of Jehovah
 - Guards His testimonies
 - Seeks Him with all the heart
 - Does no injustice
- Walks in His ways

You Yourself commanded Your precepts to keep diligently

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1. **SELF-EXAMINATION:** Would that my ways could be made to stand to keep Your statutes; then I should not be shamed while looking at all Your commandments
 2. **LEARNING:** I will praise You with an upright heart when I have learned your righteous judgments.
 3. **PRAYERFUL KEEPING:** I will keep your statutes - don't forsake me!