

Psalm 119

The Diary
of a Captive

Gene Cunningham

As Jesus Christ prepared to send the disciples for the first time throughout Israel with His message, He included in their instructions this admonition: “Freely you have received, freely give” (Matt. 10:8). This six-word summary of grace explains the financial policy of the publications and audio ministries of Basic Training. All audio materials and publications are provided without charge to anyone who requests them. For a catalog of available materials write:



P. O. Box 21773
Hot Springs, AR 71903
www.basicttraining.org

“Endure hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.” (2 Timothy 2:3)

Scripture quotations are from the New American Standard Bible, ©1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1973, 1975, 1977 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. We have departed from the NAS text by replacing the archaic formal pronouns “Thee” and “Thine” with the more familiar “You” and “Yours” in references to deity.

© 1992, 2009 by Gene Cunningham
Published 2009
Printed in the United States of America

Material in this publication may be reproduced without permission from the author so long as the material is distributed **without charge** and the source is noted. Please include the Basic Training Bible Ministries address with distributed material. If you are interested in translating this book into another language, please contact Publications Department, Basic Training Bible Ministries.

In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God.

And the Word became flesh,
and dwelt among us,
and we beheld His glory,
glory as to the only begotten from the Father,
full of grace and truth.

John 1:1, 14

Before you begin any study of the Word of God, take a few moments to make sure that you are in fellowship with God, filled with the Holy Spirit. Comprehension, like everything else in the Christian life, is a gift that can be appropriated only by faith. The Bible clearly lays out three requirements that must be met before we can expect to understand God's Word. All three require nothing from us but faith.

1. *We must be believers in Jesus Christ* (John 3:16).

It is impossible for unbelievers to understand the Word of God (1 Cor. 2:14). Jesus declared to the leading religious leader of His day that apart from spiritual birth man is blind to the things of God. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit ... You must be born again" (John 3:6).

2. *We must be filled with the Spirit* (1 Cor. 2:12).

Only the Spirit of God knows the thoughts of God. As believers we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, but when we sin, we break fellowship with God and cease to function in the power of the Spirit. When we confess our sins, God is always faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). The moment we confess, we are restored to fellowship and are again under the control of the Holy Spirit and, therefore, able to learn.

3. *We must approach in faith* (Heb. 11:6).

Only when we approach in humility, with child-like faith, will the Word of God make sense to us (Matt. 18:4; Heb. 11:3). Where we find Scripture at odds with our ideas or our desires, we must submit to the authority of the Word. Intimacy, understanding, and power are reserved for those who are willing to do God's will (John 7:17).

Contents

ix	Preface
1	Introduction
10	Aleph – <i>The Lord is my Wealth</i>
16	Beth – <i>The Lord is my Home</i>
22	Gimel – <i>The Lord is my Supply</i>
28	Daleth – <i>The Lord is my Guide</i>
34	He – <i>The Lord is my Perspective</i>
40	Vav – <i>The Lord is my Security</i>
46	Zayin – <i>The Lord is my Victory</i>
52	Heth – <i>The Lord is my Inheritance</i>
58	Teth – <i>The Lord is my Companion</i>
64	Yodh – <i>The Lord is my Maker</i>
70	Kaph – <i>The Lord is my Fulfillment</i>
76	Lamedh – <i>The Lord is my Motivation</i>
82	Mem – <i>The Lord is my Refreshment</i>
88	Nun – <i>The Lord is my Concentration</i>
94	Samekh – <i>The Lord is my Power</i>
100	Ayin – <i>The Lord is Life</i>
106	Pe – <i>The Lord is my Satisfaction</i>
112	Tsadhe – <i>The Lord is my Husbandman</i>
118	Qoph – <i>The Lord is my Reflection</i>
124	Resh – <i>The Lord is my Meditation</i>
130	Shin – <i>The Lord is my Feast</i>
136	Tav – <i>The Lord is my Shepherd</i>
143	Psalm 126
144	Scripture References

Preface

Psalm 119 is the longest prayer in the bible. It is a prayer with one theme: the all-sufficiency of the Word of God. Scripture does not tell us who wrote this psalm, but many scholars believe that it was written by one of the young people taken from Jerusalem in the Babylonian exile. Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, Azariah, Ezekiel, Ezra, and Esther all have been suggested as possible authors. This study of Psalm 119 is based on the assumption that the author was one of the captives taken in Nebuchadnezzar's third and last deportation of the Jews to Babylon.

In the taped series from which this book was drawn, there is a great deal of detailed exegesis from my study of the Hebrew text of Psalm 119. For the sake of brevity, most of that detail is not included here. Scriptures that are directly or indirectly quoted in the running text of this volume are cited in endnotes. In many cases, the endnotes include references that are not quoted in the text but are useful for additional study.

Because in Hebrew there is no special pronoun used for references to deity, I have departed from the text of the New American Standard translation of the Bible by replacing the archaic pronouns "Thee" and "Thine" with the more correct "You" and "Yours."

At the end of each chapter is a paraphrase of that section of Psalm 119. This is not a translation of the Hebrew text; it is more an interpretation, based on the Hebrew text, of what might have been going through the author's mind as he composed his psalm.

G.C.



- 627 B.C. God calls Jeremiah as prophet to Judah.
- 612 B.C. Ninevah, capital of Assyria, falls to Babylon.
- 605 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar routs Egyptian troops at Carchemish and then invades Jerusalem. He takes thousands captive—including Daniel, Hananiah, Mishaël and Azariah—and places Judah under tribute to Babylon.
- 598 B.C. Judah strikes an alliance with Egypt. Babylon attacks.
- 597 B.C. Jerusalem is captured and 10,000 more Jews are taken in chains to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar sets up Zedekiah as puppet-king.
- 588 B.C. Zedekiah attempts to break from Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar's troops sweep through Judah and begin an 18-month siege of Jerusalem.
- 586 B.C. Jerusalem falls. The city is sacked and burned, and the last captives are deported to Babylon.

Introduction

In 588 B.C., for the third time in 17 years, the Babylonian army struck the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Nebuchadnezzar's troops crashed through city after city, until all but the southern fortress of Lachish and Jerusalem itself were subdued.

As the men and women of Lachish prepared to fight off a direct assault, Babylonian soldiers were hacking down every forest and olive grove for miles. They piled trees as high as houses all around the walls of the city. Then they set their torches to the tinder and caught Lachish in a ring of fire. Day after day, the flames encircled the city until the walls caved in and Lachish fell.

Nebuchadnezzar advanced toward Jerusalem. The forests near the capital were sparse; so instead of burning down the city walls, he set up battering rams and siege engines to break them down. For eighteen awful months, the Jews fought off the assault.

Inside the walls, life became unbearable. Children cried in the streets for bread, but there was none. People's skin shrunk to their frames and turned black from hunger. Mothers murdered and ate their own children. Fast on the heels of famine came pestilence. Disease claimed thousands more lives. From every street and alley rose the awful stench of the rotting flesh of God's chosen people.¹

Finally the enemy broke through. King Zedekiah and his men tried to escape under the cover of night, but were caught. The king was forced to witness the slaughter of his sons and his nobles. Then his eyes were gouged out and he was taken in chains to Babylon.²

The invaders poured through the city, plundering and slaughtering at will. Young people watched as soldiers grabbed babies by the heels and dashed out their brains on the sides of buildings. The troops ransacked and torched Solomon's temple, which had stood as the nation's center of worship for 400 years.

Then they burned to the ground what was left of the city and leveled the wall that surrounded her.³

From the surviving Jews, the Babylonians chose all who were strong enough to endure a 500-mile march across the desert. These were the young people—many the children of Judah's aristocratic families. Chained neck-to-neck, they were led out of the ruins of the city.

Before they began the march across the desert, the Babylonian troops shaved the captives' heads, or simply yanked out their hair. Throughout the days that followed, the captives—male and female alike—were starved, beaten, raped, and tortured continuously. In the evenings, they were forced to smile and to entertain their tormentors with songs about the strength, love, and faithfulness of the God of Israel. Their songs were made more bitter by the fact that God had warned the Jews that this would happen if they did not turn back to Him. They had been too busy to listen.⁴

WHERE WAS GOD?

Forty years before the fall of Jerusalem, God called Jeremiah to carry a message to the nation of Judah: *"My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, to hew for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water."*⁵

The people had turned their backs on God. It was easy to do. They had simply turned their faces to other things. They had become preoccupied with comfort, land, possessions, and success. They no longer had time to study the Word; they were too busy for prayer or meditation or service. All the things that did not matter distracted them from the one thing that did—their personal relationship with the Holy One of Israel. When they rejected God and His Word, they sought fulfillment in other ways. But God designed man so that there is no other way; so once they

turned their backs on the Lord, they had no access to the source of life, no way to fill the cravings of their souls. The more *things* they went after, the more their souls—like broken cisterns—leaked; the more their souls leaked, the more frustrated they became; the more frustrated they became, the more intensely they went after things.

“Know therefore and see,” Jeremiah had warned, *“that it is evil and bitter for you to forsake the Lord your God.”* To see what he meant, all they had to do was turn their eyes to the North. One hundred and thirty-five years earlier, the Northern Kingdom of Israel had been stormed by the armies of Assyria. Samaria had been flattened and tens of thousands of Jews sent into captivity to other Assyrian-controlled lands. None of them ever saw Israel again.⁶

Jeremiah’s message to Judah was that they had one hope: to turn in faith to the Word of God. *“Stand by the ways,”* he cried, *“and see and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; and you shall find rest for your souls.”* But the people would not. They did not want to listen. Instead, they *“walked in their own counsels and in the stubbornness of their heart.”*⁷

For four decades, Jeremiah was a faithful messenger; and for four decades, the people made life miserable for him. First they laughed, then they harassed, then they persecuted him. As they hardened their hearts, the Lord stepped up his warnings. He told them the gifts He had given them—the gifts they had become so preoccupied with—would soon be taken away. *“I am,”* He promised, *“bringing disaster on this people, the fruit of their plans because they have not listened to My words.”*⁸

Finally judgment fell on Judah. Near the turn of the sixth century, Nebuchadnezzar overran Jerusalem. He took King Jehoiachin and his family captive, looted the temple and the king’s palace, and carried into exile thousands of young Jewish craftsmen and warriors. He installed Jehoiachin’s 21-year-old Uncle Mattaniah, whose name he changed to Zedekiah, as a

puppet king. For the next decade, Judah was a vassal state to Babylon.⁹

God continued through the prophet Jeremiah to call His people to repentance. He was still willing to deliver them; but like the Northern Kingdom a century earlier, they still would not listen. Though they did not want God's help, they knew Judah could not stand alone against Babylon; so they made political alliances with neighboring nations. When they finally rebelled against Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar initiated the drive to Jerusalem that ended in the destruction of the city and the final deportation of the Jews.

THE PROPHET'S LAMENT

When judgment finally did come on Judah, the extent of it sent even Jeremiah reeling. As he stood in the smoking ruins of the beloved city and watched the flower of the nation's youth being led away in chains, he broke into a song of lament:

How lonely sits the city
That was full of people!
She has become like a widow
Who once was great among the nations!
She who was a princess among the provinces
Has become a forced laborer!¹⁰

The last sound the captives heard from Zion was the wail of the man who for so long had begged Judah to turn back to her Lord. To the mournful rhythm of a funeral dirge, Jeremiah composed the Lamentations—a series of acrostic poems in which each verse or group of verses begins with a succeeding letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

At first, Jeremiah could think of nothing but the pain of his nation:

She did not consider her future;
Therefore she has fallen astonishingly ...

My eyes fail because of tears,
My spirit is greatly troubled
My heart is poured out on the earth,
Because of the destruction of the
daughter of my people.¹¹

The more the prophet focused on the destruction, the more personal his pain became. He began to dwell on his own affliction—on the four decades of scoffing, rejection, hatred, imprisonment, and abuse that he had endured. He began to feel as if the Lord had set upon him as a lion upon its prey:¹²

He has broken my teeth with gravel;
And He has made me cower in the dust,
And my soul has been rejected from peace;
I have forgotten happiness.
So I say, "My strength has perished,
And so has my hope from the Lord."¹³

When his anguish became unbearable, Jeremiah shook his fists toward heaven, screaming for God to remember his affliction. But as he turned his eyes toward the east, the lonely prophet saw the sun rising over the mountains of Ammon and *he* remembered something—a promise of the Word. The Spirit of God went to work in Jeremiah's soul and reminded him of what he had been declaring to the nation all along:

This I recall to my mind,
Therefore I have hope.
The Lord's lovingkindnesses indeed never cease,
For His compassions never fail.
They are new every morning;
Great is Thy faithfulness.
"The Lord is my portion," says my soul,
"Therefore I have hope in Him."¹⁴

Only when he recalled the Word of God was Jeremiah able to have hope. In the Bible, hope is always absolute certainty. Jeremiah recognized that even the devastation of the nation could not hinder the faithfulness of God to keep His promises. As he

considered the power and authority and eternity of the Holy One of Israel, he began to anticipate great things. *"The Lord is good to those who wait for Him,"* he said, *"to the person who seeks Him."*¹⁵

A CAPTIVE RESPONDS

As the line of captives pressed eastward, Jeremiah's cry reverberated off the hills: *"Zachar! Remember! Remember the Word of Lord."* In that line there was at least one captive who said, *"I will! I will remember."* And for the next 22 days, one young man set his heart wholly on the Word of God. Psalm 119 is the diary of his meditations.

Using the form of an acrostic as Jeremiah had in his lamentations, this captive began to work his way through the alphabet. Day by day he searched his soul for anything he could remember of the Word. Hebrew children were taught the alphabet through word pictures. Each letter was related to a picture and each picture to a biblical concept. So as the children learned their ABCs, they were learning principles and promises from the Word of God.

Every morning this young captive would wake up and force himself to focus on a letter of the alphabet and the symbol for that letter. As he meditated on the symbol throughout the day, he would compose eight verses. Each verse started with the same letter; each line was constructed in light of the symbol; each lesson confirmed the message that Jeremiah had hammered over and over and over before Judah's fall—the only thing that can sustain any nation or any individual is the Word of God.

This young man had lost everything except what was in his soul. But he made the decision to use what he had. He knew it was not much—not nearly as much as it could have been if he had been teachable when the Word was available—but it was his only hope. He said to himself, *"If I can use to the maximum everything I have, everything I can remember, perhaps I can reap the*

blessings Jeremiah tried to teach me about. Maybe it is not too late for God to make something out of my life.”

What God made was a testimony to His own mercy and grace. In the most horrible circumstances, this captive would prove that the Word of God works, that it is sufficient not just for survival, but for abundant life. He would come to know experientially that the Word is food and water and shelter and safety. He would learn that nothing can hinder the plan of God—nothing, that is, except unbelief.¹⁶

Of the thousands who were taken as slaves, only a handful would stay focused on the Word and would prove that God is faithful. People like Daniel and his three friends—Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah—survived the death march to Babylon; they resisted the enemy’s attempts to erase the memory of the God of Israel from their minds; they endured accusation, attack, hostility, and hatred. But God was always faithful to deliver them.¹⁷

Eventually, many of the captives were elevated to posts of power and authority in the Babylonian and Persian empires. In the end, those who had appeared powerless were shown to be vessels of the power of Almighty God. Under the witness of Daniel, King Nebuchadnezzar—one of the most powerful rulers in all of human history—became a believer in the promised Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁸

THE WORD

Every line in Psalm 119 is an expression of the desire that God has placed in every human heart—the desire to know and be known by the Lord of the universe. With every breath he takes, the captive expresses the hope that by living every day in the Word of God, he will come to the point of total intimacy and occupation with his Creator.

The Lord Jesus Christ *is* the Living Word, and He is revealed on every page of the written Word. Three times in His last revelation to the Apostle John, the Lord unequivocally declared,

"I am the Alpha and the Omega." Psalm 119 is a handbook on what He meant when He said that; everything the Word of God is, Jesus Christ is. Everything the Word of God promises is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. *"I am the Alpha and the Omega,"* He said, *"the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost."* Jesus Christ is everything in life.¹⁹

Through the worst possible devastation, the author of Psalm 119 came to understand with absolute clarity that the most important thing in life is the Word of God, for *"all things have been created by Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together."* God's purpose is that Jesus Christ Himself *"might come to have first place in everything."*²⁰

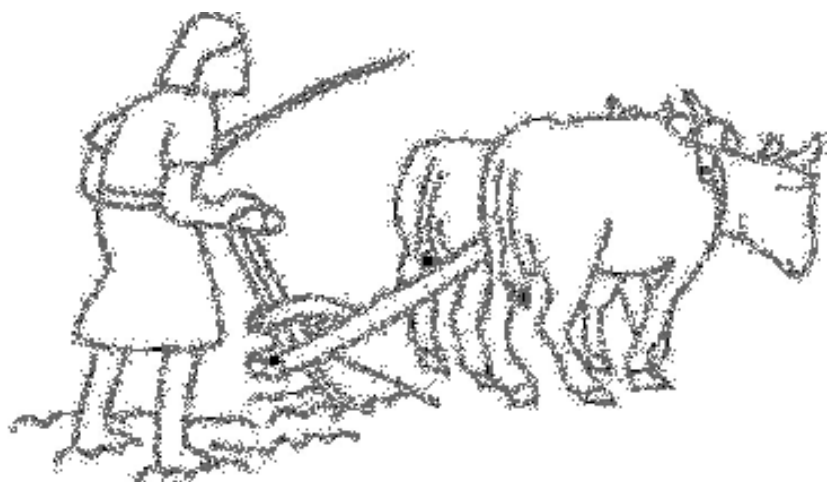


The Diary



The aleph pictures an ox.

To the people of the ancient world, whose survival depended on the tilling of the land, the ox was a symbol of prosperity. The aleph represents the wealth of the Word, which



reveals the riches of grace that

God lavishes on all believers. God “has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.”¹



A • L • E • P • H
The LORD is my
WEALTH

1 “*Blessed*” means “happy.” The young man
How blessed are those whose way is blameless,
who walk in the law of the Lord.
who writes this has survived 18 months of
famine and war that destroyed everything
he loved; stretched out before him are the
terrors of life as a slave. How in the world
can he begin his meditation with the hope of happiness? Only one
way: because he knows that the source of all blessing is the Word
of God.

In Hebrew, “*blessed*” and “*blameless*” come from the same
root, from a word that means “to walk straight.” To be blameless
does not mean to be sinless; it means to be a spiritual adult, to be
mature. We grow up spiritually by simply putting one foot in
front of the other and walking on the path that God has laid out.
If we fix our attention on the Word, we *will* walk straight—we will
learn how to deal with sin and how to keep it from being master
over us.²

The spiritual life is a step-by-step journey that takes a lifetime.
If we keep on walking in the Word—if we stay on the path—then
we will be blessed in time. We will take possession of the spiritual
wealth that is our birthright—the joy, the inner peace and
tranquility, the satisfaction in life that only God can give.

How blessed are
those who observe

His testimonies,
who seek Him with all
their heart.

The Word of God was every Hebrew child's first and ultimate textbook. It was from the Word that children were first taught to read.

When the author here talks about those "who seek God with all their heart," he is quoting a promise he learned as a child. In Deuteronomy 4, the Lord had warned through Moses that if the people turned away from following Him, He would drive them from the Promised Land. But He also told them that if from their exile they would seek Him with all their heart and all their soul, then they most certainly would find Him. God repeated that promise to this young man's generation through the prophet Jeremiah. God wants us to know Him; but to know Him, we have to seek Him. And the only place we can do that is in the Word.³

3

They also do no
unrighteousness;
they walk in
His ways.

"They do no unrighteousness" means that they do not get sidetracked. This is what it means to seek God—to stick with the Word. Our goal is not that we would never fall; but that when we do fall, we would not let ourselves be deflected from the path. God knew before He created us that we would fall and fail. That is why He gave us confession and why He tells us to forget the things that are behind and press on to the high calling we have in Jesus Christ.⁴

Feelings of guilt, depression, discouragement, and fear are the kinds of things that send us spiraling downward off the path. All of them can be avoided by faith, and faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of Christ.⁵

4

You have ordained
Your precepts,
that we should keep
them diligently.

As he walks away from the ruins of a nation that had placed no value on the Word of God, this young man is simply stating one of the most basic truths of Scripture. Before He

created anything, God ordained a way to bless members of the human race—the way of His Word. The Hebrew

word “keep” means “to guard or watch over something of value.” God commands us to guard the Word diligently, with great fervor, because He desires our good. “*Keep every commandment,*” Moses told the Jews as they were about to cross into the Promised Land, “*so that you may be strong and go in and possess the land ...*”⁶

5 This is a confession. He is saying that he has Oh that my ways may be established to keep Your statutes! This is a confession. He is saying that he has not been one of the blessed. His ways have not been blameless. He has not sought God with all his heart. But he wants to change all that now. Later he will make it clear that he had been out of line with the plan of God, and that not until God’s discipline hit did he choose to get back in line.

6 The author of the letter to the Hebrews tells us that the Word of God is living and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, and that it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. That is just what this young man is saying. Every time we come to the Word, it will do one of two things to us: it will commend us for our obedience to it or it will condemn us for our failure to obey.⁷

7 From confession he turns to praise. I shall give thanks to You with uprightness of heart, when I learn Your righteous judgments. “Uprightness” is that quality of going straight ahead, of staying on the path to God’s blessing. The word translated “learn” means “to accustom yourself through training.” This young man has a phenomenal attitude! He is looking on his captivity as training: “I will give thanks while I am training in Your righteous judgments,” he says.

I shall keep
Your statutes;
do not forsake
me utterly!

The Hebrew literally means, "I will guard and pay attention to Your statutes: You will never forsake me!" This is a statement of confidence based on a promise made by the Lord Jesus Christ to Joshua and later applied to all believers: *"I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you."* The author ends his first day's meditation with an expression of total grace dependence. He is a slave in chains, forced to endure, whatever atrocities his captors choose to inflict on him. But he has made a decision: "I see the path pointed out by Jeremiah, and I am going to take that path because I know it leads to blessing."⁸

The Lord is my Wealth

How spiritually prosperous
are those in the path of singlemindedness,
who keep on walking in the law of the Lord.

How spiritually prosperous
are those who guard His revelation,
who keep on seeking Him with a disciplined heart.

They do not get sidetracked,
for they have walked in His path.

Oh that my steps may be fixed
toward guarding over Your statutes.

Then I will not be shamed,
when I am caused to look into Your Word.

I will be compelled to give thanks
in my singlemindedness,
while training in Your righteous judgments.

I will guard Your statutes,
You will never forsake me!

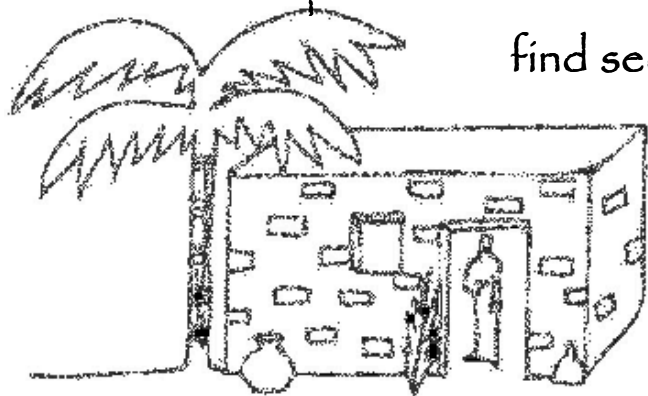




The beth pictures a house.

By itself, a house represents shelter. But when a family lives together, the house becomes a home. The Word of God is designed to be our home – the place where we can always

find security,
support,



encouragement, enjoyment, love. Jesus said that if we abide—if we live—in His Word, then we are truly disciples of His.¹



B · E · T · H

The LORD is my

HOME

9 This young man will never again experience the pleasure of simply being at home with his family; he will never hear the sound of his father and uncles arguing about the Torah after dinner, or catch the aroma of his mother's bread fresh out of the oven, or face the challenge of carving a wooden doll for his little sister.

How can a young man keep his way pure?
By keeping it according to Your Word.

All that is left of his physical home are ashes and memories; but he has a better place to live, a place no enemy can ever destroy. So on the second day of his meditations, he sets his mind on the *beth* and the idea of being at home in the Word.

The first thing a person did on entering a house in Bible times was to wash his feet. In the home of a gracious host, servants or even the host himself would do the cleansing. It was a way to say, "Welcome, make yourself comfortable in my home."²

Foot washing is a picture of confession and cleansing. Without cleansing, we cannot have fellowship with God. If we want to be at home in the Word, we cannot ignore unconfessed sinful thoughts, deeds, or actions. When we come unwashed to the open door of the Word, we are saying to Jesus Christ, "I will not avail myself of Your grace and I do not intend to be at home here."³

To "keep" means "to guard." The greatest danger we face as believers is the danger of becoming negative to the Word. If we keep a positive, hungry attitude, we *will* stay on the path. That does not mean we will not sin anymore; it means that when we do sin, we will confess and accept God's forgiveness and move on.

10 To seek God, we have to be often in the Word because that is where He tells us about who He is and what He is like.

With all my heart I have sought You; do not let me wander from Your commandments.

Every day we face two choices. One, we can stay on the path, focusing on the Word

and refining our way through confession. This leads to a life of happiness. Two, we can wander off the path, focusing on the world, other people, or ourselves. This leads to a life of misery. Because he wandered, the prodigal son ended up fighting with pigs over something to put in his stomach. In contrast, when we stay at home in the Word, we have access to the unfathomable riches of God.⁴

11 In his *aleph* meditations, the author concentrated on the fact that the Word of God was his wealth. The more we understand this truth, the more we will want to lay up the Word in our hearts and treasure it.

Your Word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against You.

How do we “treasure” the physical things we value? By keeping them out of the reach of thieves, insulated against fire and corrosion, and in prime working order. How do we “treasure” the Word? By retreating often to the storeroom of our soul, reviewing and admiring the promises, principles, and truths we have hidden there. That is just what this young man is doing. Outwardly, he is homeless and destitute. Inwardly, he is counting his riches.

To “*sin*” means “to miss the mark.” The mark he is talking about here is having the treasure of God’s Word in his soul. The sin is failure to store up the Word when we have the chance. The Word will strengthen us against sin, and it will deliver us when we do sin. But it cannot do its work when it is hidden in the pages of an unused book—it must be in our souls. The Word of God is treasure; everything else is trash. Our souls will be filled with one or the other. We decide a thousand times a day which it will be.

12 Now the captive reaches out for companionship. Blessed are You, He turns to the One who is the source of all O Lord; blessing and utters two of the most important Teach me Your words in the Bible, two words that *always* please satutes. God: "Teach me!"

Remember that the author is a slave; his family is dead and he is being led across a wilderness to a hostile nation. Yet he says, "I will retreat into my place of security and provision and companionship. I will talk to You about the treasures in my soul. You, Lord, are the source of all my blessings and You have given me wealth and riches that no one can take away."

Companionship with Jesus Christ begins with teachability, the attitude that says to God, "I do not understand what is happening to me, but I am thankful that You allowed me to be in this situation; there is something here for me to learn. Teach me!"

13 "You spoke Your Word to me," the captive is saying, "and I passed it on." He has been sharing the treasure of God's Word with others, offering to all who will hear the same companionship with the Lord that he has found. With my lips I have told of all the ordinances of Your mouth.

Sharing our treasures with friends is what we do when we invite them into our home and bid them to make themselves welcome. We sit around the dinner table, enjoying good food and good company, and talk about the things that matter to us. Though these captives have neither homes nor dinner tables around which to gather, they can still break bread together. They can share the spiritual food of the Word and find both companionship with the Lord and fellowship with one another.

14 Companionship leads to communication, and I have rejoiced in the way of Your testimonies, as much as in all riches. communication leads to celebration. The author has told others about God's Word and the result is joy. "*I have rejoiced!*" he says. As he experiences the unimaginable horrors of captivity, the Word gives him reason for revelry. This is what God created for us—fellowship, communication, enjoyment. He wants us to celebrate with Him day and night.

15 Biblical meditation involves reflecting on and digesting the Word of God. To "*regard*" means "to look intently at something or someone, to look with great pleasure and care." The captive meditates on the Word and finds in it an intimate understanding of God's plan and purpose in his life. This leads him to a deep, peaceful sense of intimacy with the Lord.

What do we do after we have shared a good meal with someone we love and know intimately, someone with who we can communicate verbally? We might go sit in front of a crackling fire. Outside, the wind may blow, the trees may swish back and forth, and the rain may beat on the windowpanes. But inside, we are relaxed and warm and well fed. At this point an amazing thing happens—very little is said, but a great deal is shared. We enjoy the fellowship of companionable silence.

16 The Hebrew word translated "*delight*" is so beautiful—*shaa*, pronounced *sha-ah*. When it is spoken, it sounds almost like a sigh. It means to caress, to touch with great intimacy—the way the woman in her boldness-mingled-with-timidity anointed the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ with oil and then dried them with her long beautiful hair.⁶

Shaa is a lovemaking term. Imagine a word like this being used in connection with a person's attitude to the Word of God! It expresses such deep affection: "I will caress Your statutes. I will never forget Your Word."

The Lord is my Home

I came to Your home, You opened Your door,
and I washed my feet.

And on greeting You,
the first thing I wanted to tell You was this:
I have looked forward to meeting You.
Remember, I have sought with all my heart.

In this place is the treasure
that I have hid and carried in my mind, my soul.

I bless You as the author
of my joy and my happiness.
You are the source of all riches.
Please do not hold them back from me,
teach me Your Word.

Break out the treasures,
Break out the blessings,
and share them with me, I need them;
I am desperate for those things.

I talk about them. I tell other people about them.
I share them with other people.

Let me feast on the banquet You provided
and then let's sit by the fire
and let's think, let's talk, let's reflect.

Afterwards, let me caress Your Word,
and express to you my affection
for what You have given me.



The gimel pictures a camel.

No other pack animal can survive the rigors of desert travel like the camel. Because in ancient times the caravan was the only way to get supplies across the desert, the gimel represents divine supply.



The Word of God

is the source
of all
supply
for
the

believer: "My God will supply all your needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus."¹



G · I · M · E · L

The LORD is my SUPPLY

17

Deal bountifully
with Your servant,
that I may live and
keep Your Word.

When a traveler set out on a journey through the desert, he knew that his life depended on his crossing paths with caravans often enough to keep him supplied with at least food and water. Whenever he spotted one on the horizon, he would go to it and barter with the merchants for the things he needed.

This young man begins the *gimel* section by asking for divine supply. When he says, “*deal bountifully*,” he uses a word that has the idea of “the ripening of fruit.” The seed of the Word was planted in his heart before the holocaust hit. He surely remembers that God promised to Isaiah that His Word would not return to Him empty, but that it would sprout and bear fruit, providing seed for the sower and bread for the eater. Now he tells God that he needs the fruit of the Word to keep him alive: “Bring Your seed to full ripening in my soul that I may live.”²

When he talks about living, he does not mean mere survival. He wants abundant life, the life that does not come by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.³

18

Open my eyes,
that I may behold
wonderful things
from Your law.

He imagines the merchants opening their packs and spreading out before him all the things he so desperately needs. He asks God to take the veil away from his eyes so that he can see the supply for his soul: the answers to the problems he faces,

the sufficiency of God to meet his insufficiency, and the strength of God to meet his weakness.

“Wonderful things” means “things hidden, things rare or of great value.” The Apostle Paul said that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Jesus Christ. Hidden treasure has to be searched for. As often as we dig into the Word and ask God to open our eyes, *that* is how often we will see wonderful things from the Word.⁴

19 He knows that as a believer in the Messiah, he is an alien on this earth, a foreigner wandering in a land that is not his own. In the *aleph* section, he focused on the fact that he was on a spiritual journey and that blessing—happiness—was to be found in staying on the path. Well, he is on the path and with every new day in the heat, the hunger, the abuse, and the anguish, he realizes how absolutely dependent he is on God for every breath he takes.

20 To be “*crushed*” is “to be shattered by violent force.” Walking away from the ruins of a totally devastated city—after having seen his friends and family starved, tortured, and murdered, and after watching all he possessed go up in flames—this young man says that his soul is overwhelmed with longing. For what? Not for his lost family, friends, or possessions—but for God’s Word.

21 Literally this is, “*You have cursed the arrogant.*” He is saying that God has disciplined the believers who turned away from His Word. For 40 years, Jeremiah warned the nation that God would bring judgment; now He has, and it is worse than they ever could have imagined.

Cursing is the opposite of blessing. Both cursing and blessing are promises from God. Which one we experience depends on our own attitude to God and His Word. Blessing is promised to everyone who stays on the path God has laid out. The only way to keep from wandering off the path is to consistently admit our sins to God and accept His cleansing and restoration.

When we become too arrogant to confess, we have turned negative to the Word. Then God will begin to discipline us because He loves us and He knows how destructive sin is in our lives. His purpose is never punishment; Jesus Christ took all the punishment we deserve on the cross. God disciplines us only to get us back on course because He wants us to have blessing and fellowship with Him.⁵

22 The author is admitting here that he had once been in the ranks of the arrogant. “I was one of those cursed people You had to rebuke,” he is saying. “I have been reproached because of my arrogant attitude to the Word. I have been an object of contempt because I have been contemptible towards Your Word. But no more. I am hungry now. Your discipline has worked; I treasure Your Word.”

23 The word “*princes*” can also be translated “commanders” or “rulers.” He is talking about the military officers in charge of the captives. Whatever they are saying, whether they are simply scorning and mocking him or accusing him of offenses he has not committed, he knows he only has one recourse. He says, “I rivet my attention on the Word of God.” It is not our job to defend ourselves when we come under unjust accusations. It is our job to focus on the Word and let the Word be our strength and our defense.

24 Just as in the *beth* section, when this young man thinks about meditating on the Word of God, he remembers that beautiful word *shaa*. He is saying, “I will make love to the Word.” Does that concept sound foreign? Maybe the reason the person of Christ is so foreign to us is because we have never been intimate with His Word. If we would go to the Word when we need guidance and counsel, we would always find the wisdom we need to make decisions. And if we would linger there, we would discover the pleasure of God’s company.

In the *gimel* section, the author is talking about a supply line that comes direct from God—where there is never any lack—to us, whatever our lack may be. When King David was at the lowest point of his life, driven from the palace by the revolt of his own son, he said, “*The Lord is my Shepherd, I cannot lack.*”⁶

Nothing can cut God’s supply line to us. We can lose the gifts He gives, but we can never lose the Giver; and the Giver never runs short of anything. He has promised to meet our needs; all we have to do is ask. The way to ask is through consistent, believing prayer that seeks more than anything the pleasure of His presence.⁷

The Lord is my Supply

May the caravan of Your grace
bring bountiful supply to me,
that I may continue to live
and to stand guard over Your Word.

Uncover before my eyes
the wonderful treasures of Your law,
that I may behold them.

I am a pilgrim in the earth,
do not conceal from me Your commands.

My soul is crushed with longing,
and I hunger for the bread of Your teachings
at all times.

Those who wander off the path of Your commands
are arrogant and stand accursed,
and You rebuke them.

Deliver me from reproach and contempt,
for I am standing guard over Your Word.

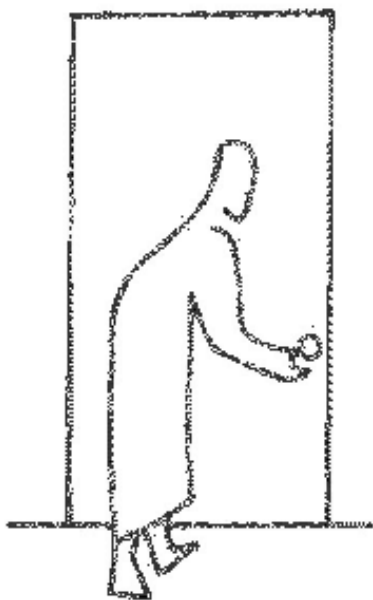
Princes of the enemy may sit and slander me,
but Your servant concentrates on Your laws.

Your testimonies are also delicacies to my soul
and counselors to my mind.



7

The dalet pictures a door. It represents decisions and the divine guidance we need to make decisions. The Word of God gives us that guidance. Jesus Christ is the source of all wisdom and knowledge, and He Himself declared, "I am the door, if anyone enters through Me, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture."¹





D · A · L · E · T · H

The LORD is my

GUIDE

25 The idea of cleaving to the dust is to lie prostrate and powerless on the ground. As the writer this day begins his meditations, he is discouraged and sorrowing under the tremendous pain and pressure of his captivity.

My soul cleaves to
the dust; revive
me according to
Your Word.

He knows that every decision he makes has the potential to be a matter of life or death. If he so much as gives the wrong look to the wrong guard at the wrong time, it could cost him his life.

But there is someone he fears even more than his captors—himself. He knows how easy it is to go negative to the Word, to turn off the path, to focus on his plan instead of his God.

To “*revive*” means “to make strong, to restore to life,” not just to existence, but to abundant life. He is admitting that he is lifeless, that he has lost focus and motivation. And so, with an attitude of absolute humility, he prays in the imperative voice—he *demand*s that God revive him. What could possibly make someone think he has the right to demand anything from God? Only this: that the thing he demands is the declared will of God.²

God is a gentleman; He never imposes Himself or His will on us. In the Word, He tells us of the wonderful things He wants for our lives and He makes thousands of promises to give us those things. But Isaiah tells us that God *waits* to pour out His blessings. What is He waiting for? For us to take Him at His Word and claim the promises by faith. That is just what this young man is doing.³

26 Praying for revival is only the first step. When

I have told of my ways, and You have answered me; teach me Your statutes. God answers our prayer—when He opens the door and says, “You asked for it, here it is”—we still have options. We can take what He offers or we can leave it. This young man wants revival more than anything else in the world; so after he has confessed his sins and God swings open the door, he blurts out those two words the Lord so loves to hear, “Teach me!”⁴

He is being taken to an unbelieving and hostile nation. Where will he find a teacher? He will have to rely on divine supply, to trust that somewhere along the way God will provide. One of the reasons he can trust is because he remembers his nation’s history. At least nine times in this psalm, he echoes the cry of the greatest king his nation ever knew. In every conceivable circumstance throughout his life, King David said to the Lord, “Teach me!” and the Lord never let him down.⁵

These are powerful words; but to be fully effective in our lives, they have to be uttered every day. Jesus promises that if we will make the decision to take up the yoke, He will teach us; and the result will always be rest for our souls.⁶

27 After we have teaching, we need

After we understand the way of Your precepts; so I will meditate on Your wonders. understanding so we can apply what we have learned. It is the job of God the Holy Spirit to give us illumination and understanding of the Word, but we must meet some conditions before He can.⁷

First, we must be born again—we must have spiritual life. Jesus said that which is born of the flesh is flesh and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. It is *impossible* for any unbeliever to understand the things of God. Second, when we study, we must be filled with the Holy Spirit and rely on Him as our teacher. Third, we must approach the Word with an attitude of availability. God shares His secrets and His power only with those who come to Him in humility and trust, willing to obey.⁸

28 This young man is still feeling tremendous anguish in his soul. But he is learning not to live by feeling, and so he cries out in faith for the strength that comes only from the Word. He has been taught the Word; he has understood the Word; now he accepts the Word—and from that acceptance flows strength.

My soul weeps
because of grief;
strengthen me
according
to Your Word.

29 Remember that at the beginning of this psalm the author made a decision to go the way of the Lord, to take the path God had set out. He is acutely aware of the danger of being sidetracked. At every crossroad, he needs discernment and protection against taking the wrong path. He acknowledges here that both discernment and protection are gifts that come only from the Word.

Remove the false
way from me,
and graciously
grant me Your law.

30 In contrast to the “false way” that he fears is the “*faithful way*” that he has chosen. “Faith” is from the Hebrew word *amen*, “to lean on for support.” It is the word the prophet Habakkuk used 20 years before the destruction of Jerusalem. He warned the nation that if they trusted in their own strength, they would be destroyed; but “*the just*,” he said, “*shall live by faith*.”⁹

I have chosen the
faithful way;
I have placed Your
ordinances before me.

Faith has to have an object, and there is only one that can give life. “*Man shall not live by bread alone*,” Moses told the Israelites who were about to take the promised land, “*but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God*.” This young man has a settled attitude; he has made a decision to set his eyes on the Word.¹⁰

31 When he opened his prayer, the author was cleaving to the dust. But he made some decisions and now he is clinging to the Word. To “*cleave*”

I cleave to Your
testimonies; O
Lord, do not put
me to shame.

means “to catch by pursuit and then to stick like glue.” This is dedication. “*Shame*” is the end result of wandering from the path, and the only way to escape shame is by making the Word the priority of our lives.

32 First this young man chose the way of faith,
I shall run the way of then he placed the Word before his eyes, and
Your commandments, now he is ready to run. An “enlarged heart”
for You will enlarge is a soul that has been strengthened through
My heart. the steady intake of the Word of God. The
person who is strong in soul will be able to make wise decisions.

The captive wants to be in the right place at the right time doing the right thing so that he can affect the course of human history. He knows now that whether he will depends on his decisions. He has to start with the words he uttered at the beginning of his meditation on the *daleth*: “Revive me! Shake me out of my apathy and motivate me!” And then he has to follow it with thousands of daily decisions to stay on the path of faith.

The Lord is my Guide

My soul is like a captive beaten into the dust,
revive me according to the promises of Your Word.

I have acknowledged my ways in confession to You,
and You have answered me, teach me Your statutes.

Give me understanding
and so illuminate my path into Your precepts,
and I will meditate on Your wondrous Word.

My soul is overcome
with grief of lost opportunities,
strengthen me through Your word,
that no more be lost.

Remove from me the path of lying,
and favor me with the grace of Your law.

I have chosen the path of truth
and have pursued Your ordinances resolutely.

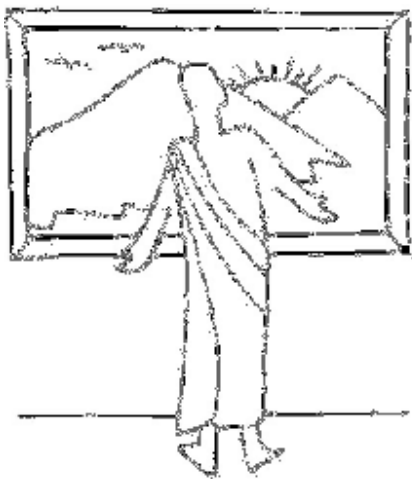
I have clung to Your testimonies
with determination, O Lord,
let me not be ashamed of my decision.

I will run the race You have set before me,
for You will increase my determination.

7



The he pictures a window. It represents viewpoint or perspective in life. There are only two ways of seeing: with divine perspective or with human perspective. They are as different as day and night. “My thoughts are not your thoughts,” declares the Lord, “... for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My thoughts [higher] than your thoughts.” As believers, we have access to the mind of Christ, which is the Word of God.'





H · E

The LORD is my
PERSPECTIVE

33 Imagine yourself in this line of captives—
Teach me, O Lord, hungry, hot, thirsty, exhausted, terrorized by
The way of Your your captors, being dragged across the desert
statutes and I shall to become slaves in a pagan nation. What kind
observe it to the end. of perspective would you have? This young
man is looking out the window of grace; and so on this morning,
he centers his meditation on things that absolutely will not be
done in his life unless God Himself does them.

In the first seven verses, he calls on God to act; each time he uses a verb form that says God has to cause something to happen. “All this is on *Your* back,” he says; “these things *You* have to do, because I cannot.”²

First he says, “*Teach me.*” The Hebrew word he uses means “to throw or shoot, to hit the mark.” The New Testament word for sin means to *miss* the mark. As believers, we aim at the goal of being conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. But we all have sinned and we all continue to fall short of the glory of God. How will we ever hit the mark? Only by latching on to grace.³

God’s way of thinking is grace. His plan is that He gives in grace, and we receive by faith. Only faith gives credit and honor to the Lord Jesus Christ. Any time we try to fulfill the plan of God ourselves, we *will* miss the mark because our own power is absolutely inadequate for the task.⁴

34 Being taught is not enough for this young man. He wants more; he wants God to make Give me understanding, that I may observe Your law, and keep it with all my heart. him understand. The Hebrew word for “*understanding*” means “discernment, the ability to evaluate the circumstances of life in light of the Word.” He wants to accomplish God’s plan for his life; to do that, he must learn to make finer and finer distinctions. Even a young believer can distinguish between bad and good; but it takes skill to see the difference between good and best. This is a skill the enemy absolutely does not want us to develop. Satan loves to offer us something good so that he can keep us from what is best.

This is illustrated in the Lord’s visit to the home of Mary and Martha. Mary sat at his feet listening to His word while Martha was busy with serving. Is service to the Lord good? Absolutely! But any time service takes the place of studying His Word, it is wrong because the Word has the priority. What was good became the worst thing that Martha could have been doing at that time, and it earned her a rebuke from the Lord. That is why we need discernment. But we cannot produce it ourselves; it is a gift of God.⁵

35 The captive uses the same development here as in the *daleth* section: first teaching, then understanding, then application. If God has to do the teaching, and God has to give us understanding, then who makes the application in our lives? Only God can. We have to depend just as much on God in applying the Word as we have to depend on Him in everything else.

“You, Father,” this young man is saying, “cause me to apply the Word today in my life. You do whatever it takes for me to fulfill Your plan and Your purpose in my life. Boot me every step of the way if You have to. I want Your will, but I do not have the energy or the ability to accomplish it. So I ask You to make me walk in the path of Your commandment.”

36 *“Incline”* means “to bend or deflect”—it has to do with motivation. He is saying to the Lord, “Keep Incline my heart to Your testimonies, and not to dishonest gain. on moving me in the direction of Your Word!” The captive sees a grave danger here. *“Dishonest gain”* is from a word that means “covetousness, greediness, the desire to have more.” In more prosperous days, Jeremiah had indicted the people of Judah for their pursuit of everything but God: *“For from the least of them even to the greatest of them, everyone is greedy for gain.”*⁶

If the temptation to greed was so intense when the nation was rich, imagine what it is like for the captive now. Before, he had been enticed by more things—money, land, status, pleasure. Now, a piece of bread is a treasure. How great is the temptation for him to covet and steal and hoard just to stay alive? Great enough so he knows his only hope of staying on the path is if God keeps on motivating him toward the Word.

37 To *“turn away”* means “to twist or direct.” *“Vanity”* is that which is “useless or worthless.” Turn away my eyes from looking at vanity, and revive me in your ways. Divine viewpoint says that there is only one thing on earth that will last into eternity: The Word of God. Everything else in life but the Word—the Living Word as revealed in the written Word—is a detail. But it is hard to stay motivated for the Word because there are so many worthless things to distract us.

What can take away our preoccupation with useless things? Only God can. Human viewpoint says if we have a distraction in our lives, we need to work at changing it. But the harder we fight it in our energy, the worse it becomes. We are not strong enough to face the giants in our lives. The only way to win is to remember that the battle is the Lord’s.⁷

“Revive me in Your ways” means “Wake me up! Cause me to live in the spiritual realm. Only You can do it. I do not want simply to survive; I want a life that has purpose and meaning. In *this* place, at *this* time.” How can a slave in chains experience abundant life? Only by faith in the fact that God wants him to have it and that His blessings is never hindered by circumstances.

38 The Word of God is the priority of life. To Establish Your Word to Your servant, as that which produces reverence for You. “*establish*” means “to strengthen or to cause to become a foundation.” “Plant my feet on Your Word,” he says. The Word of God received by faith will make us reverent. As we look deeper and deeper into the Word, we will see in increasingly richer detail the face of the greatest man who ever lived, the Lord Jesus Christ. The more we see of Him, the more real He will become to us, and the more impressed we will be with Him every day of our lives.

39 We all make bad decisions; we all sin; we all face shame and reproach. But God can always restore us and He can always make good come out of the evil we do. This young man’s rebellion against God had helped bring down his nation. While divine viewpoint says, “Turn to Me and I will forgive you; I will purify you; I will wash you and you will be whiter than snow,” human viewpoint says, “It cannot be that easy; surely there is something I have to *do* to win back God’s love and favor.” The author sees the danger of falling into self-reproach and shame, and he turns to the only One who can deliver him from himself.

40 “I crave Your Word,” he cries. This is positive volition in the highest degree. All through his Behold, I long for Your precepts; revive me through Your righteousness. meditations on the *he*, this young captive has said over and over again to God, “Make me dependent on You.” God’s power is perfected not through human strength, but through human weakness. Our strength only gets in God’s way. If we want to stay on the path and fulfill God’s plan for our lives, we have to be broken and diminished until we recognize that God does not want our ability; he wants our availability.⁸

The Lord is my Perspective

Teach me, O Lord, the right path of Your statutes,
and like a watchman on the wall,
I will attend to them.

Cause me to see life from Your perspective,
and I will keep your law
and regard it with all my heart.

Cause me to talk
in the path of Your commandments,
for I am inclined toward them.

Let my heart bow in humility
before Your testimonies
and not to unjust gain.

Cause me to turn away my eyes
from seeking vain things
and give me abundant life in Your ways.

Make Your Word a foundation to Your servant,
as that which builds reverence toward You.

Deflect from me the reproach and shame
that I dread,
for Your judgments are good.

See how I have desired Your precepts,
in Your righteousness give me life.



¶ The vav pictures a peg. Driven deep into the sand, pegs anchored the tents in the desert. Hammered into the walls of houses, they secured the shelves that held the family's goods. The vav represents stability and security. In our uncertain and unstable world, there is only one sure anchor for our souls—the eternal Word of God:



“The grass withers, and the flower falls off, but the Word of the Lord abides forever.”¹



V · A · V
The LORD is my
SECURITY

41 “*Lovingkindness*” is the Old Testament word for grace. It is no accident that as the young captive sets his mind this morning to the idea of stability, his first thought is of grace. He had survived the day before by laying hold of divine perspective; all day he had meditated on the fact that God’s plan is only accomplished by God’s power.

So as he awakens, he remembers that grace depends on who and what God is, never on who and what we are. He realizes that because God is permanent, grace is permanent. Therefore, though all the things he had trusted in before are gone, his source of stability cannot be shaken.

Isaiah had declared that the Messiah “*shall be the stability of your times.*” Stability is from *amen*, to lean on for support. We are stable not because of our strength, but because of the strength of the One we lean on. We are safe because we are secured by God.²

The author acknowledges this when he asks for God’s salvation—His deliverance—*according to His Word*. The Word of God is eternally secure: “*In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.*” The Word is the Lord Jesus Christ, the Rock of our salvation, the only stability in the universe.³

42 His cry for deliverance through the Word is not an academic exercise. He knows that on this day—as on every other day of this march to Babylon—he will be mocked and abused and tortured. How will he make it through this

So I shall have an answer for him who reproaches me, for I trust in Your Word.

day? He will have to wrestle, in the very best sense of the word. “Trust” is *batach*, an ancient wrestling term that means “to body slam your opponent to the mat.” He is casting all his cares on the Lord, knowing that the Lord cares for him.⁴

43 “Wait” is the Hebrew *yachal*, a word usually translated “hope.” It means “to apply healing to a wound.” The tense here indicates accomplished action. This young man’s soul had been deeply wounded; but

And do not take the word of truth utterly out of my mouth for I wait for Your ordinances.

instead of focusing on his pain, he has consistently trusted in the Word. “I have been healed,” he says, “by Your law.” The Word held his soul together like the stitches of a surgeon mend a torn and broken body.

“Hope” in both the Old and New Testaments is never an “if” word; it always means absolute confidence. But to get to the healing of hope, we have to go through the wrestling of trusting the promises of God.

44 Remember that to “keep” means “to protect, to watch over something we treasure.” If we treasure the Word, then we will guard it. The way to guard it is to use it. Why do we forget

So I will keep Your law continually, forever and ever.

principles of the Word? Because we do not reach into our souls every day and pull them out to apply them to our lives. We are forgetful *hearers* instead of effectual *doers*. This young man no longer has access to the written Word. All he has is what he stored in his soul before his calamity hit. It is not nearly as much as he could have had, but it is all he has; and he is determined to guard it with his life.⁵

45 Literally, he says, “I will walk in a wide place.”
And I will walk at liberty, for I seek Your precepts. The widest place in the universe is in the breadth and length and height and depth of the love of Christ. Only in God’s plan can a slave in chains see himself as a free man, facing not a thousand problems, but a thousand possibilities.⁶

From the very beginning of his meditations, this young man has focused on the path of God. Now he talks about how he will negotiate that path, how he will make the necessary adjustments in life that will allow him to move safely and victoriously through whatever is ahead. He says, “My attitude to the Word sets me free because I seek Your precepts.” He has become aggressive; he is motivated to study and understand what he possesses of the Word of God.

46 Now that he has found the stability that
I will also speak of Your testimonies
before kings and shall not be ashamed. comes from the Word, he has the desire to declare it. Something has changed in his attitude and in his motivation. He is not slinking along like a whipped dog with its tail between its legs; now he is on the offensive, determined to win his captors.

When the captives arrive in Babylon, they will be sold as slaves. They will be displayed—naked, starved, scared—before princes, before governors, before even the king. This young man is deciding *now* what he will do *then*. He is determined that he will square his shoulders, lift his head, look into these powerful men of the world in the eye and tell them that he is an ambassador of the King of kings and the Lord of lords! That is how aggressive he has become.⁷

47 As he voices his desire to pursue the Word
And I shall delight in Your commandments,
which I love. and his determination to unashamedly declare it before the world, he is brought back to the

to the wonder of intimacy with God. There are at least ten different words for love. The one he uses here implies both great strength and great tenderness. "*Delight*" is, again, *shaa*. He is saying, "Your Word is the love of my life. When I look at it, I will fall in love all over again. I will touch it with tenderness and with awe."

48 Again he speaks of his love and again he expresses it through the idea of caressing the Word. As he comes to the end of another day of physical slavery, this captive makes one more decision guaranteed to move him further along the road of blessing. "I will meditate," he says. "I will go over and over and over Your Word."

An apparently helpless young man in an apparently impossible situation has taken control of his own destiny. He finds stability in the Word of God; and because the Word is the peg on which he hangs his life, God will make him a peg in history.

The Lord is my Security

Suddenly the world as I knew it is gone—
parents, friends, leaders, nation—everything.

What is left that I can hold to?

Where will my trembling soul find support?

I will call on the grace of God.

Your salvation and Your Word are unshakable.

And now, Father, as I stand a captive in chains
—helpless, hopeless—

show me the stability of Your truth,

As I endure the mocking, abuse, and torture,

I will have an answer.

Almighty God holds the reins of history,

I bodyslam my troubles on You.

Your Word heals the wounds of my soul.

Suddenly, I lift my head, square my shoulders,
and face my captors. I am standing on the Word.

And though I am a slave in chains,
my persecutors are afraid of what they see in me.

Although a slave, I am more free than they.

My soul roams the height, the length,
the breadth, and the depth of Your love
—something more vast than the universe.

I am compelled to speak of You not timidly,
but with a boldness, an aggressiveness
that makes me the master.

They are the captives by my witness.

My soul exults and shouts in triumph.

How I love Your Word! How I love You!

In the death march to Babylon,

as I focus on Your Word,

I am transported from the chains of prisoners
to a palace in my soul

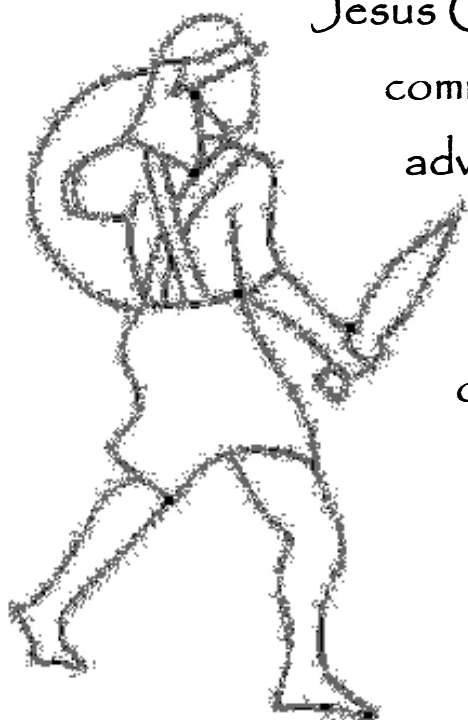
and I stand before the King.

C



The zayin pictures a sword. It represents advance in battle. In spiritual warfare, we have only one weapon—the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. As believers in

Jesus Christ, we are commanded to advance by growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.¹





Z · A · Y · I · N

The LORD is my

VICTORY

49

Remember the Word
to Your servant,
in which You have
made me hope.

There is nothing like having the right Scripture come to mind at just the right time of need. It is something we cannot make happen on our own. The Word of God is the sword of the Spirit. It is His weapon—only He can wield it.

And so the captive starts his meditations this day by asking for the recall ministry of the Holy Spirit and by focusing on the comfort of being spiritually armed.

He echoes here the cry of Jeremiah as he stood in the smoking ruins of Jerusalem. *“Hope”* is *yachal*, the word for healing faith: *“This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope.”* Jeremiah’s wound was healed when he remembered that the Lord’s grace would never end and His compassion for His servants would never fail. He knew that even the fall of the nation could not keep God from fulfilling His plan in the lives of all who seek Him.²

In the same way, this young man declares his absolute confidence that God is greater than his circumstances and that He will use him above and beyond anything he could think or ask. He knows by faith that God will act; we know from history that He did act. Led away in humiliation and defeat, captives like Daniel and Ezekiel became—by faith—the lawmakers, the judges, and the rulers of the Babylonian empire.

50 “*Comfort*” is consolation and encouragement in the face of enemy oppression. Exactly what is his comfort? That the Word of God has made him alive. The Word has given him something he did not have when he was free—the capacity

This is my comfort
In my affliction, that
Your Word has
revived me.

to enjoy life. He had discovered that victory in life, as well as blessings, usefulness, and quality, depends on one thing: his attitude toward the Word of God.

51 The greatest expression of arrogance is the refusal to believe God. “*The arrogant*” here are the unbelieving Babylonian soldiers. To “*utterly deride*” is to treat with scorn and contempt and it includes physical abuse. Every day this young

The arrogant utterly
deride me, yet I
do not turn aside
from Your law.

man faces new waves of verbal and physical assault, but every day he leans harder on the Word of God and grows stronger. “I will not give ground,” he is saying. “They have not swayed me from my belief in the Word.”

52 Now he draws the sword. The Word of God studied but forgotten is just as useless as the sword sharpened but sheathed. In a spiritual battle, we can only use what we can remember of the Word. The author is talking here about

I have remembered
Your ordinances from
of old, O Lord, and
comfort myself.

the recall ministry of God the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is our helper and guide. He is able to bring to our minds phenomenal truths from the Word, but the operation of His recall ministry is limited by two choices that only we can make. First, we have to have something inside for Him to recall from. That means we have to choose to store the Word in our souls. Second, we have to choose to be filled with the Holy Spirit. He will not knock us aside and take the reins of our lives every time He sees trouble coming. We have to learn—by a thousand daily choices of faith—how to hear His voice and walk in His counsel.³

53 His sword drawn, the captive now begins his advance. “*Burning indignation*” in the Hebrew is *zalaphah*. The *zalaphah* was a burning wind from the desert. The Arabs called it a poison wind—hot, dry, merciless. Burning indignation has seized me because of the wicked, who forsake Your law. Why has the author been caught by this relentless desert wind? Because of the wicked, the believing but rebellious Jews, under opposition and hostility, forsook the Word. “When I see them,” he says, “I am picked up and driven along by the desert wind. I will not stop my advance.” Seeing the deserters, he is motivated not to fall like they have fallen.

54 In his reflections on the *gimel*, this young man said that he was a stranger in a strange land. Your statutes are my songs in the house of my pilgrimage. “Open my eyes,” he asked, “that I may behold wonderful things from Your law ... Your servant meditates on Your statutes.” Now, that which had been his meditation has become his song. When the other believers are turning aside from the Word, he says, “I will sing because I have something in my soul to sing about.”

55 The Jews so revered the name of God that they did not dare even speak it. When, in reading Scripture, they came to the sacred name *Jehovah*, they would simply sigh or say instead, *Adonai*, “My Lord.” The scribes who copied the Scriptures always used a pen newly dipped in ink to write the name of God and were instructed that should a king address them while writing that name, they were to take no notice of him. But as holy as God’s name was, the Lord told his people there was something they should revere even more. “You have magnified your Word,” King David declared, “above Your very name.”⁴

To the ancient Hebrews, a person’s name was a window into his character. To know someone’s name was to know who he was and what he was like. When this captive says that he will

remember God's name in the night, he is saying that in darkness—in adversity and trial and suffering—he will meditate on the character of God as revealed in the Word. And in that meditation, he will *keep* the Word. This is the seventh time he has used the Hebrew word meaning “to guard as a treasure” in relation to his attitude to the Word of God. He will use it thirteen more times.

56 Literally this reads, “This has become mine *because* I observe Your precepts,” he has just said, “I remember Your name—Your character, Your authority, Your cause—in the difficult times.” Now he is saying, “I have taken Your Word to myself because my eyes have been opened to Your truth.” He is taking on himself the cause of keeping alive the Word of God to his fellow captives and to his enemies.

The captive, stripped of all means of protecting himself, realizes that in the Word of God he carries the greatest weapon in the universe. He has made the decision to take up the sword of the Spirit and become the aggressor in the conflict.

The Lord is my Victory

Unarmed before the world yet armed by God,
unsheath the sword of truth from my soul.
With this sword I will conquer.

In oppression and affliction I have comfort,
the keen edge of truth will preserve my life.

In the arrogance of unbelief
my captors taunt me,
but I stand my ground in the light of truth.

When I draw that flaming shaft,
I find comfort,
it was forged by the mouth of God.

When I see others give ground
and retreat from the line,
I am driven to advance like the hot desert wind.

In the tent of my pilgrimage,
I will sing with my sword in hand.

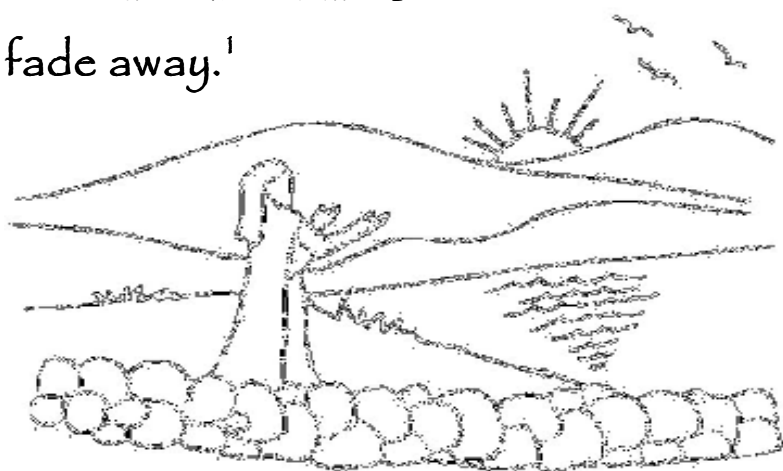
In the darkest night I remember You, Lord,
Your name is engraved on this blade,
and I will uphold Your cause.

This cause has become mine,
because I am enlightened
with regard to Your Word.





The heth pictures an enclosure, a fenced-in area. It represents the inheritance marked out by God for every believer, including a “lot” in life—a unique task to accomplish and the skills and provisions necessary to accomplish it—along with great blessings in time and rewards in eternity. Our inheritance is secured by God and is “imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away.”¹





H · E · T · H

The LORD is my INHERITANCE

57 As the captive looks into the black hole that is his future, he remembers Jeremiah standing in the rubble of Jerusalem. The nation was devastated, but the prophet set his eyes on something more real than the ruin. *"The Lord is my portion,"* he had said, "therefore I have hope." The prophet was echoing words written 400 years earlier by King David in a psalm that ends with a promise: "You will make known to me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; in Your right hand there are pleasures forever."²

The author has lost his nation, his family, his possessions, his freedom. But he has something of infinitely more worth—he has the Word of God in his soul. In his meditations on the *zayin*, this young man decided to advance. Because of his faith, he can now rest in the fact that the Lord *is* his portion.

58 To ask for someone's favor was to ask a person to turn his face toward you in a kindly way. The author wants to see the Lord's face light up in a smile. He wants to experience the grace, the mercy, and the compassion that the Lord extends to every believer through His Word.

At this point in his meditations on the *heth*, he is viewing his inheritance as the Exodus generation did theirs at Kadesh Barnea. The Lord had determined to give the land of Canaan to Israel. He had told Moses it was theirs for the taking; all they had to do was trust Him. Their chance came when Moses sent 12 spies into the land. They all saw the same thing: a good land inhabited by giants. Ten focused on the giants and said, "We can't win." Two—Joshua and Caleb—focused on God and said, "We can't lose." The entire nation chose to follow the ten, and the price was 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. Every adult of that generation, except Joshua and Caleb, died in the desert, and God gave the land to their children.³

The author of this psalm, like Joshua and Caleb, sees the giants, but he sets his gaze on God. "I still have the Lord," he says. "He has given me His Word, and in the Word I find all the grace and blessing I could ever need."

59 Now the captive decides to enter the land. "*I considered my ways, and turned my feet to Your commandments.*" *considered my ways* means "I underwent intensive self-evaluation, soul-searching to the highest degree." He looked at the paths he had been taking and saw they were all wrong, so he made a decision to confess and turn back to the path that leads to the Promised Land. "I will go the way of the Word," he says.

When the Jews finally stood on the banks of the Jordan, ready to cross into Canaan, the Lord told Joshua, "*Every place on which the sole of your foot treads, I have given it to you.*" This young man has decided it is about time that he set foot on the land and start taking possession of the things God designed for him.⁴

60 Now he becomes aggressive in his spiritual advance. He knows that his sins helped bring about the fall of his nation, and yet God, by grace, left him alive. Despite his own guilt, he

I hastened and did not delay to keep Your commandments.

does not doubt God's ability to bless him. He does not say, "It is too late now. How can God bless a captive?" Instead, he says, "God is able to give me what He has marked out for me, and I will zealously drive forward." He has the same aggressive attitude that Caleb did when, at the age of 85, he finally was able to go in and drive the giants off his portion of the land.⁵

61 The *"cords of the wicked"* is a reference to giants in the land. There are always giants in the Promised Land; and if we want to advance, we have to face them. To "encircle" means "to entangle or hem in." The cords of the wicked have encircled me, but I have not forgotten Your law. He is talking about the sins, the circumstances, and the people that draw us away from God. Like weeds in a garden, they choke out growth and production. They strike at the root of our life—Bible study—and at the fruit of our life—service.⁶

This young man confesses that he has fallen into these things, but he has not given up the battle to them yet. He keeps turning back to the Word.

62 Midnight represents a time of intensive testing, a time of great trial and difficulty. At midnight I shall rise to give thanks to You because of Your righteous ordinances. The *"righteous ordinances"* speak of God's divine decrees. The author is emphasizing once again that God has designed blessings for his life. He knows that God planned provision and supply for him, and that He intends to cause all things—even slavery, even the fall of the nation—to work together for his good. "Therefore," he says, "I will give thanks."

63 *"Companion"* is from a word that means "to bind together with a cord." *'Fear'* means "reverence." These are the cords of reverence, of respect for God. As the cords of wickedness represent bad associations,

I am a companion of all those who fear You, and of those who keep Your precepts.

these cords represent good associations. This is the idea of having fellowship in the Promised Land with others who treasure the Word and who are occupied with the person of Jesus Christ.

Of the Exodus generation, Joshua and Caleb were the only two who believed that God could do what He had said He would do. Because they had been fellow warriors of faith for so many years, they shared things that no one else could share with them. Out of the multitude of this captive's generation who survived the fall of Jerusalem, very few remained positive to the Word and pressed on through the march across the desert, through torture, and through slavery in Babylon to become great believers. Among those who did, there was a bond that others could not share.

64 *"Your lovingkindness,"* he says, *"has filled the earth."* The Hebrew *chesed* is a magnificent word that defies translation. Sometimes it is translated "mercy," sometimes "loyal love," sometimes "grace." It incorporates all three.

The earth is full of
Your lovingkindness,
O Lord; teach me
Your statutes.

As this young man scans the horizon, all he can see is the fullness of God's grace and love and mercy. He is a slave, but he knows he has a destiny; and he knows there is only one place he will find it—in the Word of God. And so he ends this prayer with the cry God longs to answer for each of us, *"Teach me!"*

The Lord is my Inheritance

The Lord is my portion, my Canaan rest,
I will be resolute in keeping Your Word,
that I may claim my blessings in time.

I have requested with all my soul
that You will look on me in favor.
Be compassionate with me
according to Your promises.

I have scrutinized the pathway into blessing,
and I have corrected my steps
to follow Your testimonies.

I will accelerate my spiritual advance,
that I may seize my Hebron without delay.

The snares of wicked men have entangled me.
But Your Word I have never forgotten,
and by this I am delivered.

In the season of darkest testing,
I will give You thanks
because Your divine decrees will prevail.

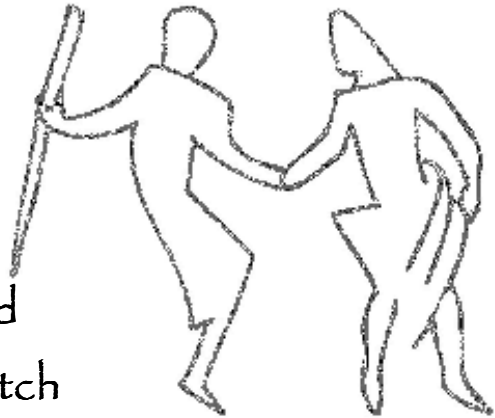
I am a soldier in ranks
with those who have reverence for You,
and we hold the line of trust in Your Word.

Your love, grace and mercy fill the earth, O Lord.
Teach me, train me,
and make me a disciple of truth.





The teth pictures a hand, a hand ready to grip another. It represents relationship. Jesus Christ holds out to every person the offer of a relationship with God by faith. To as many as receive Him, He gave the right to become children of God. As children, we have the security of Jesus' promise that "I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of My hand."¹





T · E · T · H

The LORD is my COMPANION

65 Opening his eyes on this ninth morning, the captive—battered, starving, chained—is immediately consumed by one thought: the goodness of God. In the Hebrew, the first word in the sentence is “*well*.” It can mean “good” in every sense of the word—“pleasant, delightful, right.” But it especially refers to divine good, that which is good from an eternal perspective. From human viewpoint, he has every reason to be miserable; but when he looks at his world from the perspective of his relationship with God, all he can see is good.

To “deal” means “to make something out of existing materials.” He knows that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love Him, and so he says, “Lord, out of this disastrous situation You have manufactured good for me.”²

66 Discernment is the ability to make wise decisions. It comes from knowledge, which is the ability to see the big picture in life. Our goal is to be able to look at our difficulties, sufferings and frustrations from God’s perspective.

It takes faith to acquire discernment and knowledge. “*Believe*” here is from the Hebrew word that means “to lean on for support.” We need help; we have to be taught. We need not just a textbook, but a teacher. We need not just someone who will map the route, but someone who will lead the way. That is what we have in the Word.³

67 This young man knows from experience how vital discernment is. When everything was fine in his life, it was easy to wander away from the Word. Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your Word. After all, the road of spiritual growth is steep and difficult. God promises that if we stay on His path, we *will* be blessed. But our enemy is a master at enticing us onto the more convenient and smoother side roads.

What the enemy does not tell us, of course, is where his roads lead, which is straight to discipline. Because we have a relationship with Him and because He loves us, God will bring into our lives as much pain as necessary to get us back on track. When the awful discipline fell on this young man’s life, he humbled himself under the mighty hand of God and he let himself be trained by it. The result, he says, is that he now treasures and guards the Word.⁴

68 In all his pain, the author is not shaking his finger at God and saying He isn’t fair. Instead, You are good and do good; teach me Your statutes. he says that God is righteous and just and was right to bring judgment on the nation. He understands that God is inherently good and that everything He puts His hand to is the very best.⁵

Why does a God who is good and who loves us allow pain into our lives? Because pain gets our attention. God knows that sin always hurts us. The reason He says “Thou shall not ...” is not because He does not want us to enjoy ourselves, but because He wants to spare us pain. When we insist on going our own way,

He allows us to experience the consequences of our decisions and to feel the pain of our choices.

Even when He allows great pain in our lives, His purpose is *never* punishment. All He wants is for us to correct ourselves and get back on the path of blessing. That is exactly what this young man did. “*Teach me!*” is the cry of a hungry heart, and God *always* satisfies hunger to know Him.⁶

69 “*The arrogant*” are his captors. They have

The arrogant have contrived false charges against him. In his forged a lie against me; situation, false charges could bring torture with all my heart I will observe or even death. What should he do to protect Your precepts. himself? There is only one thing he *can* do: trust in the Word. He has the discernment to know that he cannot allow himself to be distracted by trying to vindicate himself. “With all my heart” means that he has a single-minded focus on the Word of God, the one thing in life that never changes. That is what Jeremiah did when he was attacked; that is what Jesus told His disciples to do. “*Rejoice and be glad,*” He said, “*for your reward in heaven is great.*”⁷

70 “*Fat-hearted people*” are people who have been

Their heart is negative to the Word of God for so long that their covered with fat, hearts and souls and minds have become but I delight in senseless. They have so gorged themselves on the Your law. philosophies and pleasures of the cosmos that they are totally insensitive to the Word. They stand in stark contrast to the author whose spiritual hunger drives him every day to a deeper intimacy with God.

“*I delight in—I embrace—Your Word,*” he says, again using that lovely word *shaa*. When we are totally alone, when we have no arms to hold us, we can hold on to the Word. The Lord wants to comfort us. He desires to embrace us: “*The eternal God is your dwelling place and underneath are the everlasting arms.*”⁸

71 What an attitude! This young man looks at the terrible affliction he has been through and declares it good. Why? Because it made him teachable. It is wonderful to look back on affliction and say, "That was good for me." But our goal is to be able to say this in the *middle* of our difficulties—when all we want to do is complain.

72 As he closes his meditations on the *teth*, his last thought is of how good the Word of God is. Six times in eight verses he has declared something in his life to be good. This young man has a taste for life. He is able to filter out all the bitterness and the fear and the pain because he sees his life from the perspective of the Author and the Finisher of faith. He understands that life starts and stops with Jesus Christ—that He is the hero of the universe. He understands that the written and living Word is more important than anything in life, even *"thousands of gold and silver pieces."* And he understands something else—he can have a grip on life because Jesus has a grip on him: *"The steps of a man are established by the Lord; and He delights in his way. When he falls, he shall not be hurled headlong; because the Lord is the One who holds his hand."*⁹

The Lord is my Companion

Out of great disaster,
You have executed eternal good
for Your servant, O Lord,
in keeping with the promises of Your Word.

Teach me to make decisions
consistent with Your good will,
to see the whole picture of Your providence.

Before my discipline came
I kept straying off the path,
but now I guard and keep Your Word.

You, O Lord, are of infinite good,
what You bring to pass is good
in view of eternity.
Teach me divine viewpoint from Your Word.

Those overflowing in arrogance
have hammered out lies
in the forge of deception;
with my whole being I will observe Your principles.

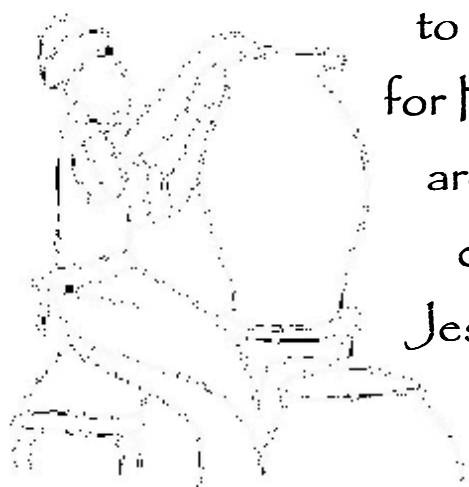
Their conscience is seared
and insensitive to truth,
but I embrace Your law with reverence.

Your inspired standard of living is my priority,
more than all earthly wealth and prosperity,
therefore my grip is secure.





The yodh pictures a cupped hand, a hand prepared to take hold of something and ready to work. It represents divine production. As we open hearts to the Word, the hand of God molds and shapes us into vessels useful



to the Master and fit for His service: “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared

beforehand that we should walk in them.”¹



Y · O · D · H
The LORD is my
MAKER

73 All through the day before, the captive
Your hands made me and meditated on the *teth*, the folded hand of
fashioned me; give me relationship. Driven across the desert by
understanding, that I may the lash of whips in the hands of his
learn Your commandments. captors, he set his mind on the goodness
of the One who held his hand even in this desolate place. Now, as
he faces another day in chains, he turns his thoughts to the *work* of
God's hands.²

When he says, "*Your hands made me,*" he uses the same Hebrew word that he did the day before when he said, "You have *dealt* well with Your servant." It means to make something from existing materials. The existing materials are everything that has been a part of his life up to this point. To "fashion" means "to establish or prepare." He is saying, "Not only did You create me and put me in this place at this time, but You have prepared me for this."

God, who in eternity past saw every possible situation we could ever be in, set limits on all our testing and, in His Son, provided solutions to all our problems. He has promised that He will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we are able, "*but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that [we] may be able to endure it.*"³

This young man has the spiritual focus to say, "Lord, You made me and prepared me for this day, and there is some work of faith You want me to do *here, now*. But I do not know what it is, and on my own I cannot. You have to open my eyes; *You* have to cause me to understand."⁴

74 The first work that comes to his mind is the work of encouragement. "*Be glad*" is from a word that means "to clap your hands with joy." In this line of captives are other believers who desperately need encouragement. God has a plan for using this young man to provide it.

Why should the other captives be glad when they see him wait for God's Word? The author here uses *yachal*, the word for "healing faith." He wants the others to see that the Word is the salve they need for their sores, but the only way they will is if they see him apply it in his own life. They need to see in him the kind of stability that enabled Paul to say, "*we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed, perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.*"⁵

75 Why is this young man able to apply the Word and wait for healing to take effect? Because he understands God's character and God's ways. He knows that God is inherently and absolutely good and right and that He can never be unfair. He also knows that God never does anything or allows anything to happen without a purpose.⁶

This young man's affliction is the worst kind of personal terror and devastation, and he sees it all as coming from the hand of God. But because he knows the character of God, he has no bitterness. Twice in his meditations on the *teth*, he declared that the affliction has been good for him because it turned him back to the path of blessing.

76 Not until he has experienced the comfort of

O may Your
lovingkindness comfort
me, according to your
Word to Your servant.

the Lord, not until he has been cradled in the arms of God, will this young man be able to comfort others. When he cries here for the lovingkindness of God, he uses a Hebrew word that refers to deep love—the affection of a nursing mother for her infant, the compassion of a father for his children. The Lord feels this compassion for His children, *“for He Himself knows our frame; He is mindful that we are but dust.”* To Jeremiah He declared, *“I have loved you with an everlasting love. Therefore I have drawn you with lovingkindness.”*⁷

“According to Your Word” means that this young man is claiming promises and expecting answers.

77 Why does he need the compassion of

May Your compassion come
to me that I may live, for
Your law is my delight.

God? That he may live. Again, he is talking about the abundant life promised by the Lord Jesus Christ—the life of peace and joy that circumstances can never disturb. This young man’s ground for expecting comfort is the fact that he is claiming promises from the Word. His ground for expecting abundant life is that he delights in the Word. The Lord promises that if we delight ourselves in Him, He *will* give us the desires of our hearts. When the captive lays these requests before the Lord, he does not have to wonder how God will respond. Therefore, he has the confidence that can cause others to “be glad,” to clap their hands with joy.⁸

78 When his captors continue to plot and

May the arrogant be
ashamed, for they subvert
me with a lie; but I shall
meditate on Your precepts.

scheme against him, he responds by intensifying his study of the Word of God. *“Precepts”* refers to principles of daily application. He has made up his mind that the only way to deal with his enemies’ attacks is to concentrate on how to *apply* the Word to the tests he faces today.

79 Earlier, he prayed that other believers would see him and be glad because he is not lost, he is not confused—he has divine viewpoint and a sense of destiny even in captivity. But he wants these people to do something more than just be glad. He wants them to turn to him so that he can hold them up and teach them how to find the same strength and stability that he has found in the Word.⁹

80 *“Blameless,”* remember, does not mean sinless. It means “mature, complete, fully formed.” He is saying, “Bring me to completion; finish the work You started in my life.” How will God do that? One way—by grace through faith. All he has to do is stay on the path of the Word. He has to be willing every day to examine himself, confess his sins, and receive the cleansing and the empowerment that God offers through His Word.

To *“be ashamed”* is “to be confused, disgraced, disappointed.” This captive understands that he is the workmanship of God, prepared by God for this time of calamity to work for the benefit of others. “Do not let me disappoint these people who are looking to me for strength,” he says. “Do not let me be put to shame in Your plans for my life. Do not let me disgrace Your grace.”

The Lord is my Maker

For this hour of calamity
I was uniquely designed for productive service
by Your skillful hands,
cause me to discern my purpose
from Your commandments.

Others who have reverence for You
will clap their hands with joy
when they see me sustained by Your hand
as I lay hold of Your Word.

I know, O Lord, that Your discipline is just
and that in faithfulness You have scourged me.

May the hand that corrects me
also convey mercy and administer comfort,
as You promised in Your Word.

Reach out to me with Your compassion
so that I may find abundant life,
for I caress Your teachings.

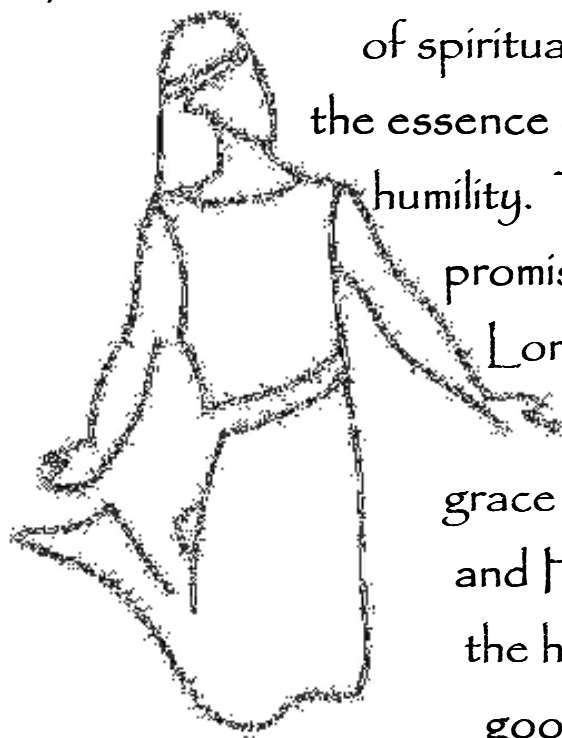
Strike the insolent with confusion,
for they have maligned me,
but I will dedicate myself
to intensive study of Your eternal principles.

Draw those who respect your will to me,
let them see Your Word
alive and powerful in me
and gain strength.

Cleanse my hands through Your Word,
that I may stand mature
and not be a disgrace to Your grace.



The kaph pictures an empty hand,
open and waiting to be filled. It
represents the outstretched hand



of spiritual need,
the essence of which is
humility. The Word
promises that the
Lord, always
gives
grace to the humble
and He always fills
the hungry with
good things.¹



K · A · P · H
The LORD is my
FULFILLMENT

81 As he forces his wasted and aching body to rise and face another day's trek across the hot sand, My soul languishes for Your salvation; I wait for Your Word. the captive is overwhelmed with a sense of exhaustion and emptiness. He knows that without the deliverance of God through every step of this day, he will not survive. With his cry for salvation, he is raising his empty hands to God in an expression of intense spiritual hunger and absolute helplessness.

How does he expect God to bring salvation? Through His Word. "*Wait*" is *yachal*, "healing faith." The captive is going to fill his need by waiting for God's Word. In his tremendous pain and anguish, he is going to trust God; and in that trust, he will find healing for his soul.

82 The Hebrew expression "*my eyes fail with longing*" draws the picture of someone looking down a path as far as he can and not seeing any hope in sight. "I am coming to the end of my rope," he is saying. "I look at what lies ahead—at the persecutions, the sufferings, all the horrible things yet to come—and I do not know how I am going to make it."

His sense of emptiness can be explained. He had neglected the Word when he had the opportunity to take it in. God had provided a teacher in Jeremiah, but he had not wanted to listen.

Times were too good then; he saw no need for the Word. Now he sees that need with absolute clarity.

When he asks for comfort, he uses a word that means to sign. It implies an intense concern or pity out of which comes consolation. “I need *You* to comfort me,” he says. “*Talk* to me; I need *Your Word!*” He can pray with confidence because he knows it is God’s will to console His people.²

He is asking for the recall ministry of the Holy Spirit. We know the Holy Spirit as the *Paraklete*—the One called alongside to help, the Encourager, the Comforter, the One who alone can wield the sword of the Word. This young man wishes that he had more of the Word in his soul, but he knows that whatever he has is sufficient to sustain him *if* it is drawn in the power of the Holy Spirit.³

83 An empty wineskin hanging inside a home or tent would eventually become blackened and cracked from the smoke of the fires over which meals were cooked. To the Jews, wine represented joy and fullness; the shriveled wineskin is a picture of uselessness and emptiness. Remember that in Lamentations, Jeremiah talked about how the famine in Jerusalem caused the people’s skin to become shriveled and black. This young captive looks at his physical condition and sees in it a picture of his spiritual condition. Like the wineskin, he needs to be repaired and refilled. He knows that only God can repair the destruction in his soul and fill him with the joy of life.

All of a sudden, remembering the Word of God has become the most important thing in his life; so he searches through his memories—of his childhood, his days in school, the messages of the prophet he had mocked—for a phrase, a passage, a promise, or a principle out of the Word.

84 Literally he is saying, "How much time do I have left? I feel as if my days are almost over, and I do not want to waste any more." The number of our days was recorded by God before we were ever

born. As believers, we are called to redeem the time. The only currency for buying time is the eternal Word of God. "How many are the days of Your servant? When will You execute judgment on those who persecute me?"

born. As believers, we are called to redeem the time. The only currency for buying time is the eternal Word of God. "*Teach us to number our days,*" Moses cried to God, "*that we may present to You a heart filled with wisdom.*" The only thing any of us will take out of this world is what we have learned and believed from the Word.⁴

When he calls on God to "*execute judgment*" on his persecutors, he again uses the word that means "to manufacture out of existing materials." The same circumstances that God can turn to good for those who love Him, He will turn to judgment against those who do not love Him.

85 The "digging of pits" refers to the constant verbal and physical harassment and abuse he endures at the hands of his enemies. They are doing everything in their power to trap him, to cause him to fall. These are men who,

The arrogant have dug pits for me, men who are not in accord with Your law.

because they have hardened themselves to the Word of God, have no conscience, no compassion, no concept of right and wrong.

86 In his meditations on the *daleth*, the author looked at the false way of the world and the true way of the Word and said, "I have chosen the faithful way. I have placed your ordinances before me." "*Faithful*" means

All Your commandments are faithful; they have persecuted me with a lie; help me!

"trustworthy, reliable." It is from *amen*, the word for "leaning faith." What can we do when our enemies are contriving to make us fall? We can find something to keep us steady; we can lean on the Word. This young man will lean on the staff of the Word and will find the comfort he cries for. He will be able to say, as did

David at one of the lowest points in his life, *"Your rod and Your staff they comfort me."*⁵

87 Over and over again his enemies had brought him to the verge of death. Even so, he would not forsake the Word. What gave this young man the power to stand before his tormentors? The very Word on which he chose to lean. *"Be strong and courageous, do not be afraid or tremble,"* Moses told the Jews as they stood poised to enter the promised land, *"for the Lord your God is the one who goes with you. He will not fail you nor forsake you."* When the author of Hebrews repeats this promise, he draws a conclusion from it: *"He Himself has said, 'I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you,' so that we may confidently say, 'The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?'"*⁶

88 *"Revive me!"* he says, *"Restore me! Strengthen me! Motivate me! Give me the abundant life that only You can give!"* How will God give him all these things? Only one way: according to His lovingkindness. We need the mercy that withholds the judgment we deserve and the grace that gives all the riches and blessings we do not deserve. Both are possible only because of the love that sent Jesus Christ to the cross on our behalf.

The Lord is my Fulfillment

My soul is empty and craves Your deliverance,
in deep affliction Your Word heals me.

As I look down the long path of sorrow before me,
my eyes fail in searching for Your Word.

My appearance is black and wasted,
I feel useless and empty,
but I do not forget Your laws.

How much time do I have left on the earth?
When will You perform judgment on my tormentors?

Arrogant men constantly harass me,
setting pits before my feet.

They have hardened their hearts to Your Word.

I know Your commandments are a faithful staff
on which I may lean for support.

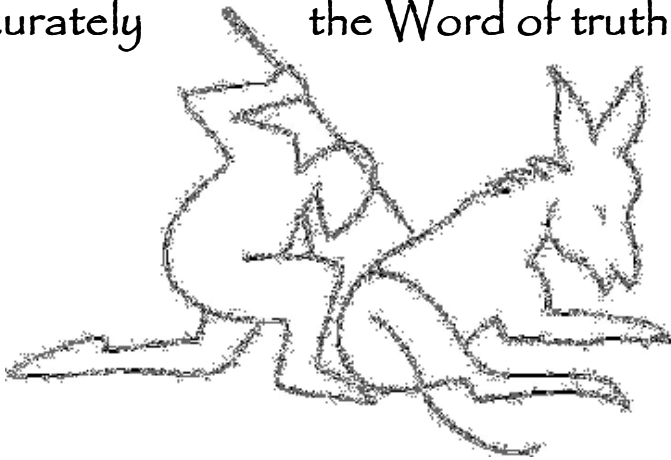
My enemies hound and pursue me with deception.
Help me!

They have brought my life
to a thread on the earth,
but I have not abandoned Your principles.

Bring revival to my soul
as befits Your grace and mercy,
so that I do not quit,
but keep the decree which You have proclaimed.

k

1 The lamedh pictures an ox goad, a sharpened stick or staff used to prod a sluggish work animal forward. It represents spiritual motivation. The Word of God is our motivation. We are commanded to be diligent to present ourselves approved to God as workmen who do not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the Word of truth.'





L · A · M · E · D · H

The LORD is my MOTIVATION

89 Opening his eyes on the silent pre-dawn sky, is
Forever, O Lord, the captive tempted to dwell on how alone he
Your Word is settled is? He has no one to teach him now, no one to
in heaven. urge him on, no one to encourage him. He has
hundreds of miles of heat and thirst and hunger and torture still
to endure, and—beyond that—slavery in Babylon. Where will he
find the motivation to keep on putting one foot in front of the
other? There is only one place he possibly can: the Word of God.

“Forever, O Lord,” he says, addressing Jehovah, the covenant-keeping God, *“Your Word is established!”* He is recalling the words of Isaiah: *“The grass withers, the flower fades; but the Word of our God stands forever.”* The Lord Jesus Christ would later say just as emphatically that heaven and earth will pass away, *“but My words absolutely never will!”*

Of all the things that we can hold in our hand on this earth, only the Word of God is eternal. This young slave knows that when God makes a declaration, it will come to pass; and when He makes a promise, He will keep it. Therefore, he has reason to keep moving forward.

90 Though his generation is living through a
Your faithfulness continues throughout all generations; national holocaust, this young man is not
You established the earth, shaking his fist toward heaven and
and it stands. demanding to know how God could let
this happen. Instead, he is praising God

for His faithfulness. He remembers that God had warned the nation that all this would happen if they did not turn back to Him. He also remembers that the God who is faithful to judge unbelief is just as faithful to reward belief. He knows without a doubt that the One who honored the faith of Joseph, Rahab, Samson, Gideon, David, and Jeremiah will honor his faith as well.³

91 In the Hebrew this says, “Your ordinances They stand this day stand this day.” To “*stand*” means “to be according to Your strong, stable, secure.” He is saying that ordinances, for all things everything God has ordained is as secure as are Your servants. God Himself. He who promised to the rebellious nation, “*I will hurl you out of this land!*” also promised to all who would seek Him, “*I will turn their mourning into joy, and will comfort them ... and My people shall be satisfied with My goodness.*”⁴

With his eyes, this young man can look at the soldiers who guard him and see that they are well-fed and well-armed, while he is starving and in chains. From what his *eyes* can see, they are in control, and he is at their mercy. *But* because he is looking not with his eyes, but with his soul—through the window of the Word—he can see with perfect clarity that he is at *God’s* mercy, that *God* is in control. Babylon is only the servant of God, the whip in His hand with which He is disciplining the people He loves in order to bring them back to the place of blessing. The author understands that everything and everyone are servants of God.

92 Again he turns to the idea of the love and intimacy he shares with his Creator because If Your law had not been my delight, then I he sets his mind on the Word. Though he is would have perished in stripped and beaten, bruised and bloody, my affliction. surrounded by hatred and violence, there is a place he can go and find love, tenderness, and comfort. He can go to the Word. Because he *chooses* to delight himself in the Word,

he has an intimate relationship with the Lord; and this intimacy gives him reason to keep on living. The motivation he needs to have victory in life comes from the Word, but he has to *go* to the Word to get it. He has to *decide* to make the Word the priority of his life.

93 In Hebrew, this is extremely emphatic: I will never forget Your precepts, for by them You have revived me. “*Forever I will never forget Your precepts!*” he says. For years, this young man had heard Jeremiah teach. He had not listened very well, and so he remembers only a fraction of what the prophet taught. However, since all Jewish schooling was centered on the Word of God, as a child he had stored a great deal of the Word in his soul. He learned to read from the promises of the Word. He learned the history of his nation from the principles of God’s dealings with man. Consequently, though he does not have as much of the Word as he could have had, he is determined to guard what he does have. “I will never forget what I have learned, because by Your Word You have given me abundant life!” he says.

94 There are only two reasons anyone ever has I am Yours, save me; the right to expect God to deliver him. First, for I have sought because of his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, he Your precepts. is a child of God. “*We are His people,*” David wrote, “*and the sheep of His pasture.*” This young man has the right to expect the Shepherd to defend and provide for him.⁵

Second, because he is spiritually hungry. “*I have sought Your precepts,*” he says. He has been applying himself to the pursuit of the Word, and the Lord promises that *everyone* who seeks will find.⁶

95 “*Wicked*” means “perverted, twisted,

The wicked wait for me to destroy me; I shall diligently consider Your testimonies. distorted.” It refers to something that was at one time straight. The wicked are other Jewish captives who are not positive to the Word, who do not seek God. They cannot stand the fact that this young man has humbled himself before God and is finding the joy. He wants them all to find. “*Wait*” is *qawah*, the strongest Hebrew word for faith—the word that means to take many small strands and weave an unbreakable rope. But, unlike the author, the wicked do not wait to see God’s Word fulfilled; they wait to pull the advancing believer down through maligning and slander. The author handles this test the way he has handled every human attack so far: he intensifies his study of the Word.

96 In the Hebrew, this verse says that

I have seen a limit to all perfection; Your commandment is exceedingly broad. everything that comes from man has limits. Human beauty, strength, intelligence, ingenuity—all are limited and incomplete. This young man once trusted in the things of this life to bring him happiness, but the destruction of his nation forced him to see the emptiness of his old scale of values. Now, he has begun to see how the Word can sustain and fulfill him. He is coming to know from experience that God’s Word is sufficient for every circumstance in life.

From the perspective of God, the Word is perfect, unchanging and infinite. But from the perspective of the finite man who feeds on it, the Word improves with age. The more we learn of the Word, the more we understand and appreciate God and the more motivated we are to know Him better. As children of God, we will spend eternity exploring the Word; and it will never grow old!

The Lord is my Motivation

As I remember the destruction
of everything I held dear,
I know, O Lord, that Your Word
remains forever established in heaven.

Your faithfulness and consistency
are as real in this generation
as in all generations,
for You set the earth in place, and it stands.

Your divine decrees stand this day,
for all things are Your servants.

If Your Word had not stimulated
and motivated my soul, then I would have perished
in the holocaust of my nation.

Apathy and indifference will never rob me
of Your principles,
for they goad me on to abundant life.

Deliver me, for I am Your child,
and my soul is motivated toward Your principles.

The reversionists can't wait to devastate me,
therefore I will intensify my study of Your decrees.

All earthly perfection is limited,
but Your commands are infinite in their scope.





The mem pictures water. No one can appreciate more keenly that a desert people how precious is water. The mem represents not only life-giving salvation, but also the cleansing of confession and the refreshment of study of the Word. All thirst is quenched



in Christ, who said, "If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink." Christ "loved us and gave Himself up for us, that He might sanctify us, having cleansed us by

the washing of water with the Word."¹



M • E • M
The LORD is my
REFRESHMENT

97 As the sun burns away the last cool traces of night,
O how I love the captive turns his burning soul to thoughts of the
Your law! It is *mem.* Four hundred years earlier, David had known
my meditation thirst in the wilderness. "O God," he wrote, "You are
all the day. *my God; I shall seek You early; My soul thirsts for You,*
my flesh yearns for You, in a dry and weary land where there is no
water."²

Immediately, he recalls one of the first psalms he learned as a child, Psalm One. At this gateway to the book of praises, God makes a promise to every thirsty soul: "*How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night. And he will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither; and in whatever he does, he prospers.*"³

When the captive says, "*I love Your law,*" he uses a word that speaks about the love of a very close friend, someone with whom he is compatible and comfortable. Why does he feel this way about the Word? Because it is *God's* Word. God has one basis for evaluating our love for Him: our attitude toward the Word. If we love Him, we will love His Word; we will cling to and dedicate our selves to His Word. If we have no dedication to the written Word, then we have no real love for the living Word.⁴

"Meditation" comes from a word that means "to say something over and over again." On a hot day, we drink glass after glass of water in order to keep on working. Just so, this young man knows he must come back moment after moment to the tap of the Word for refreshment.

98 The sun moves in its slow, steady course across the sky; the captive with every footstep drinks refreshment from the water of the Word. As he does, he thinks about the revival that the Word brings to his soul. In particular, he sees that the Word of God has given him three things. The first is wisdom—the skill of applying the Word to life. The Word gives us tactics for fighting the spiritual battle. This young man has enemies who are out every day to destroy him physically and spiritually. The only way he will survive is by skillfully applying the promises, the principles, the doctrines of the Word to every trap they set.

99 The second thing the Word has given him is *"insight."* The Hebrew word means "intelligence, information, the ability to utilize useful data." The teachers he is talking about here are not teachers of the Word. They are the Babylonians out to brainwash their Jewish captives in order to erase every trace of Israel and the God of Israel from their lives and thoughts.

The author says the enemy's techniques will not work because he is smarter than they are. In his situation, he has to be wiser than a serpent and as harmless as a dove. And he is, because he has a brand of street smarts that can only come from the Word of God. The Lord does not intend for these captives to die. He intends that they live and fulfill their purpose as missionaries to the enemy.⁵

100 The third thing the Word of God has given him is understanding—insight, discernment, perspective. Wiser than his enemies, smarter than his instructors, and more discerning than the elders—and yet what is this young man? I understand more than the aged, because I have observed Your precepts. He is a slave. But he is a slave who constantly drinks the water of the Word. He is able to deal with his situation because he has made the Word his meditation; he has focused on, observed, and dedicated himself to God's precepts.

101 Now he turns from the idea of the life-giving qualities of water to its ability to cleanse. To I have restrained my feet from every evil way that I may keep Your Word. "restrain" means "to cut short, to withhold or restrict." Remember that he has set his heart on staying on the path to blessing. The way to stay on the path is *not* to quit sinning—this young man knows that he, like everyone else, will continue to sin until he dies. The way to keep going is simply to confess when we *do* sin: *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* Only continual confession and focus on the Word can keep us from being side-tracked.⁶

102 Many of the other captives did turn aside and plunged into reversionism because they I have not turned aside from Your ordinances, for You Yourself have taught me. reacted to their circumstances instead of responding to the Word. They became bitter, cynical, hardened, angry—willing to do anything they had to to stay alive—even as far as ratting on other believers, turning against members of the family of God.

This young man says, *"I have not turned aside."* Why not? Because he has let the Lord Himself be his teacher. *"The Lord will continually guide you,"* Isaiah promised to the spiritually thirsty, *"and give strength to your bones; and you will be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water whose waters do not fail."*⁷

103 There is nothing more refreshing, nothing sweeter to the soul of man, than the Word of God. It is *"sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb."* The Lord designed it for our refreshment as well as our sustaining. How sweet are Your words to my taste! Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth! This young man, weary from the chains and the loneliness and the burins sand, digs into the Word and begins to feel the strength and the power and the motivation to press on.⁸

104 The *"false way"* refers to the way of false teachers—those who teach what purports to be truth but is not. False teachers are described by Jude and Peter as clouds without rain, springs without water. They *look* as if they will bring refreshment, but they cannot because where there is not truth there is no refreshment.⁹

The Lord is my Refreshment

Like a thirsty man in the desert,
I love the water of the Word,
it is my refreshment each day.

Your commands make me tactically wiser
than my enemies, for they stand by me in trouble.

I have more insight than my instructors,
the Babylonian brainwashers,
for the Word cleanses my thinking.

My discernment and perception
are greater than those of the elders,
because I stay focused on Your precepts.

Through the cleansing of the Word,
I withheld my feet from all evil,
that I might guard Your Word.

I have not reverted from Your ordinances,
for You Yourself have instructed me.

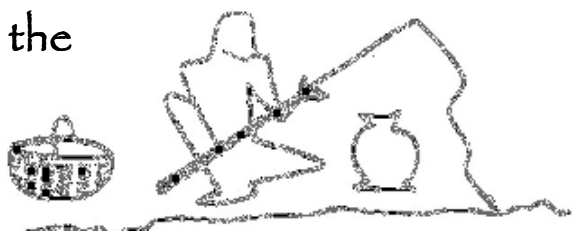
How tasteful is Your Word on my tongue,
more refreshing than honey to my mouth.

Your precepts give me clear perception,
therefore, I hate all false teachers.
They are like wells without water.





The nun pictures the improbable – a fish standing on its tail. It represents total concentration. The plan of God, which calls for finite man to reflect the glory and exhibit the power of God, requires our absolute concentration on the Word. We are exhorted to bear down with our minds on Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, to fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, and to reflect on Jesus so that we may not grow weary and lose heart.'





N · U · N
The LORD is my
CONCENTRATION

105 A man holding a lantern travels an unfamiliar and dangerous path on a moonless night. His lamp sheds only enough light so he can take one step. But when he takes that step, the light advances with him, and he can see to take one more step. And so he moves throughout the night, focused on a patch of light.

As the captive begins to think about the *nun*, as he pictures the fish so improbably balanced and so wholly concentrated, he sees himself negotiating a dangerous path in the dark. The only light he has is what he carries with him, what he has of the Word of God in his soul. As he concentrates *not* on his feet, *not* on the path, *not* on the void that gapes before him, but on the light of the Word, he is shown the next place to plant his foot.²

Because he believes the promises of the Word, this young man knows that if he simply keeps focused on that patch of light and keeps putting one foot in front of the other, he *will* come to the fulfillment of God's plan for his life. No matter how thick and threatening the darkness may seem, no matter how faint his light may feel, he knows that the dark can *never* extinguish the light. God *is* light, and God is inextinguishable.³

106 Because he understands that it is not the one who holds the light, but the light itself that overpowers the darkness, he can concentrate on his objective: "I have made a commitment to stay on the path of blessing, and I will treasure Your Word to the end!" He has absolute confidence in the outcome of his life because he knows, like Paul, that *"faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass."*⁴

107 Having confidence that God will accomplish His work does not necessarily remove from us the pain of the circumstances He is working through: *"God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it."*⁵

When this young man says he is *"exceeding afflicted,"* he is talking about unspeakable hurt. But look at what he prays for—not escape or relief, but life: "Revive me! Wake me up! Open my spiritual eyes so that I can see the abundant life You want me to have!" He was asleep when the holocaust hit his nation. He does not want that to happen again.

108 The "freewill offering" was an offering of thanksgiving. How amazing that this young man has the concentration to be so thankful that he, who owns nothing, desires to give something to God. The only thing he can give is prayer—the words of his mouth and the meditations of his heart. *"Through Him then,"* the author of Hebrews says, *"let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name."*⁶

He asks to be taught because prayer demands knowledge. But how will he be taught now? He has no temple to go to, no prophet to listen to, no written Scriptures to read. All he has is the

Word he has stored in his soul, and the Spirit of God. And so he says, "God, my life has come down to where the rubber meets the road. You have to teach me out here in real life. You want me to live grace? Show me grace here! You want me to reflect Your compassion? Show me how to care about my torturers. Teach me!"

109 This is a bold statement of spiritual aggressiveness from a young man who refuses to concentrate on the dangers in his life. He is saying, "God, You give me enough light for one more step. In the Word, I have everything I need. My life is continually in my hand, yet I do not forget Your law. I have made a commitment to stick with Your plan until the end. Now I am ready to take my life in my hands and go to battle!"

Armed with the most fearsome weapon in the world, this captive is a covert warrior in the angelic conflict. When his captors look at him, they see a slave; they see a man stripped and beaten and bloody and helpless. Yet in his soul, he carries the flame of the light of the world.⁷

110 Remember that the wicked are not unbelievers but reversionistic believers—The wicked have laid a snare for me, yet I have not gone astray from Your precepts. straying off the path of righteousness—who will do anything to save their own necks. The compromisers always hate the steadfast believer because he rocks the boat of their comfort. No matter how devious their schemes to entrap him, the author refuses to be tricked. He is determined to concentrate not on the wicked, but on the Word. And so once again when he is under attack, he does not try to defend himself or to retaliate; he stays focused on the Word and entrusts himself to God.

111 All day he has concentrated on the Word of God. Now his concentration bears the fruit of joy. He has looked at his circumstances and found joy. I have inherited Your testimonies forever, for they are the joy of my heart.

stances and at those who threaten him; he concludes that no matter how much he has lost, his inheritance makes everything worthwhile. He has lost the nation, the temple, the prophets, his family, his land, his home, his possessions, his friends, his freedom—but he has the Word. Paul said the same thing when he declared that *everything* in his life is dung compared to the joy of knowing and having fellowship with Jesus Christ.⁸

When he says that God's Word is his forever, he means *forever*. *"For you have been born again,"* Peter wrote, *"not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and abiding Word of God."*⁹

112 Remember the *nun*, the fish on his tail? This young man has that kind of concentration. He has chosen to black out all the distractions that surround him and to focus on the objective. To "incline" means "to stretch out, to extend yourself, to press to the finish." It is the final sprint of a runner at the end of his race. "I can see the finish line," the captive is saying, "and I am going to concentrate every fiber of my being on driving forward. I am going to press on to the absolute end because the Word of God makes it all worthwhile."

The Lord is my Concentration

As I descend into the dark pit
of all my tomorrows,
Your Word lights my steps
one by one on the path.

I am bound by solemn oath,
and I will prove it by consistency
that I will guard Your precepts forever.

Through the blows of disciplinary action,
wake me from spiritual apathy,
according to the power of Your Word.

Accept, O Lord, the grace gift
of praise from my prayer life
and teach me Your standards.

As a warrior behind enemy lines,
I take my life in my hands,
I will grip the sword of truth securely.

Those who compromise in reversionism
lay snares for me,
but I will not wander off the safe path of truth.

Your Word is my eternal inheritance,
it fills my soul with heavenly celebration.

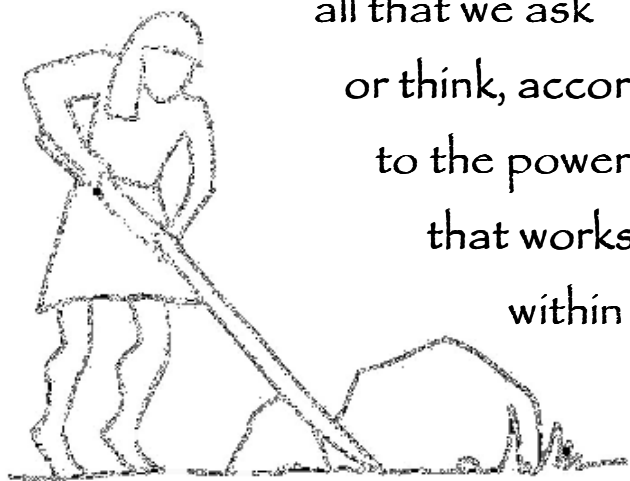
With resolution in my soul,
I will press on to fulfill my eternal destiny,
I will be tenacious to the end.





The samekh pictures a fulcrum, the prop or support on which a lever rests. It represents the enabling power of the Word of God. The Word is the rock; our faith is the lever. When we rest our faith on the Word, we have the power to move any obstacle because God “is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond

all that we ask
or think, according
to the power
that works
within us.”¹





S · A · M · E · K · H

The LORD is my

POWER

113 As he begins to meditate on the relationship between power and the Word of God, the captive thinks first of all about the men who have no power because they do not concentrate on the only source. To be “*double-minded*” means “to doubt, to divide.” The Hebrew word pictures the nervous flitting of a bird from place to place. These are believers whose attention and focus are divided. They *will not* rest on the Word; they *will not* apply the principles of the Word; therefore, they will always be powerless.²

This young man’s hatred of these people is a biblically bonafide hatred. It is a righteous indignation against that which threatens what he loves. These double-minded people are a distraction to him. He has made a commitment to stand firm and to focus on the Word. He knows that he must concentrate and recall and review in order to keep from losing what he has of the Word in his soul. But all around him, these believers flit back and forth and back and forth, doing everything they can to separate him from the Word.

114 The power that the double minded lose by their distraction, this young man gains by his focus. A “*hiding place*” is a covert, secret place

You are my hiding place and my shield;
I wait for Your Word.

where one can find refuge and rest. *"You are my hiding place,"* David said to the Lord. *"You preserve me from trouble; You surround me with songs of deliverance."* And the Lord's response? *"I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go; I will counsel you with My eye upon you."*³

"You are my shield," the captive says, "my defense and my protection in this spiritual battle." When he says, *"I wait for Your Word,"* he uses *yaqal*, the healing word. The believer in Jesus Christ *always* has something to look forward to. This young man has been stung by the attack of other believers; but when he applies the Word to his wound he can say, "I have hope, because nothing can stop the plan of God."

115 Now he talks to the double-minded. To Depart from me, "depart" means "to turn aside, to turn away." evildoers, that I may This is an imperative. Literally he says, "Get observe the command- behind me!" This is how Jesus responded ments of my God. when Peter tried to get him to turn away from the cross: *"Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's."* This young man is fighting a war; he cannot afford to be distracted.⁴

116 He turns now to the Lord with the cry of a fallen soldier lying helpless on the battlefield: *"Sustain me!"* The word means Sustain me according to Your Word, that I may live; and do not let me be "to prop or hold up." He is severely ashamed of my hope. wounded, and he knows that in himself he does not have the power to rise and fight on. But he does have faith; and so he says, "Lord, prop me up with Your Word! Give me something to hold on to. Do not let me just lie here on the battlefield! I want to live! I want to finish my race!"

117 Picture the wounded soldier. First he cries to Uphold me that I may be safe, that I may have regard for Your statutes continually. be propped up; now he wants to be helped forward. To “*uphold*” means “to support forward.” As this young man is lifted up by the Word and he gets his balance, he says to the Lord, “Let me lean on You so You can move me forward in Your plan.”

The *samekh*, remember, represents increased power. The Lord “*gives strength to the weary*,” Isaiah wrote, “*and to him who lacks might He increases power.*” How does He do this? There is only one way—by breaking our power and replacing it with His: “*Though youths grow weary and tired, and vigorous young men stumble badly, yet those who wait for the Lord will exchange their strength. They will mount up with wings like eagles ...*”⁵

This young man had heard Jeremiah’s warnings that he who relies on human strength, human wisdom, and human resources will be cursed. He had been taught that God’s plan operates by grace through faith. Grace always gives; faith can only receive. Faith is, therefore, always an admission of helplessness; and helplessness is the key to power. God’s power is *perfected* in weakness.⁶

118 He knows that the only source of power for spiritual life is the Word of God, but You have rejected all those that wander from Your statutes, for their deceitfulness is useless. he is surrounded by deceivers and compromisers, by believers who despise the Word and have chosen to wander from it. In the Hebrew, this says that their deceitfulness is “falsehood.” In their fraud—as they compromise and pervert the Word in efforts to protect themselves—they are living a lie. It is a lie that has already found them out, because when they rejected the Word, God rejected them. He has no use for people who have no use for the Word.

119 To “remove” literally means “to cause a Sabbath, a time of rest.” “You have given the land a rest from the hypocrisy of the wicked of the earth like dross; therefore I love reversionists,” he says. Though he was one whose rebellion helped bring

judgment, the author has turned around. Every day he sees the world more surely from the perspective of God; and as he looks on the believers who have not turned around, who are still wandering from the Word, he gains more respect for divine discipline. He says, “I have seen the discipline of the Lord; and when I did, it made me fall in love with the Word.”

120 *“The fear of the Lord,”* Solomon wrote, *“is the beginning of wisdom.”* The fear this captive knows is reverence for the omnipotent and holy God. It is a fear without which he will never experience the power of God in his life.⁷

Until we understand the relationship between God’s power and our own, God cannot use us in His plan. In the spiritual battle, there is only one hope for us to accomplish our destiny—we must rely on divine provision and divine power. Jesus did not declare blessed the self-confident, the self-sufficient, or the strong, but the poor in spirit—the people who are willing to come to God with empty hands and believing hearts. *“All things,”* Jesus said, *“are possible to him who believes.”* The Word of God is the fulcrum; faith is the lever. Together, they can accomplish anything.⁸

The Lord is my Power

When the price of believing is your life,
so many vacillate and compromise.
I hate as enemies those who are double-minded,
hopping about like frightened birds,
but I love Your law,
for in it my soul finds compatibility.

You, Lord, are my cave of Adullam,
my refuge in retreat and my shield in advance,
I am healed and led onward by Your Word.

Stand back, all who compromise faith for safety.
Separate from me,
that I may guard the commands of my God.

Let me find leverage through Your Word,
that I may be sustained
so as to fulfill my destiny of service to You,
let me not be put to shame
in my expectation of eternal glory.

Though wounded on the battlefield of life,
I continue to advance as a true warrior.
Pick me up, support me, and I shall be saved,
so as to honor Your protocols continually.

You have trampled underfoot
all who have drifted from Your statutes,
their attempts to survive through deception
will be vain.

You have given the land rest
from the refuse of reversionists,
therefore I love Your promises.

My flesh shudders and trembles
in reverence for You,
I stand in awe of Your omnipotent judgment.

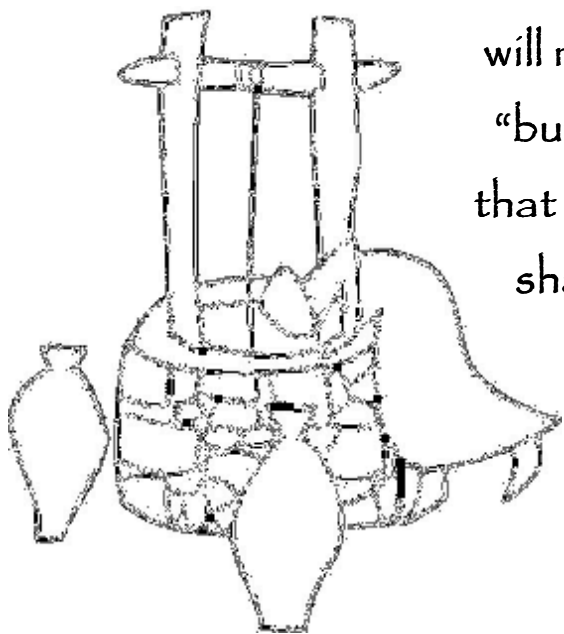




The ayin pictures a fountain of water. In ancient desert climates, people could settle only in places where there were reliable springs. The ayin represents the only reliable source of life and growth and refreshment – the Word of God. Jesus promised that whoever drinks of the water He gives

will never thirst:

“but the water
that I shall give him
shall become in him
a well of water
springing up
to eternal life.”¹





A · Y · I · N
The LORD is my
LIFE

121

I have done justice
and righteousness;
do not leave me to
my oppressors.

All morning the soldiers herded the slaves into the sun, pressing toward Babylon. Exhausted, aching, thirsty, dreading the cruelty of his captors, the author turns to the Word. As he concentrates on the *ayin*, he makes what sounds like an incredible claim: *"I have done justice and righteousness."* Isaiah taught that all man's righteous deeds are despicable in the sight of God. Jeremiah declared that man's heart is deceitful and desperately sick. David proclaimed there is no one who does good. So how can the author make such a claim?²

"I have done" means "to make something from existing materials." The only existing materials he has are the Word of God and a set of painful circumstances, but that is all he needs. Out of the Word flow the essence and character of God. When, in the power of the Holy Spirit, the captive applies the Word to his circumstances, God's character is reproduced in him. So, he can claim to *"have done justice and righteousness"* because by faith he has dealt with other people in ways that are fair and right. Tortured, starved, abused by his captors, ensnared by fellow believers, he has continued to focus on the Word and conduct himself as an ambassador of God to his enemies.³

"Do not abandon me to my oppressors," he cries. Though he feels every pressure his enemies apply and he knows that in himself he is helpless before them, his cry to the Lord is one of

confidence. He has learned how to trust the one who promised, “*I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you.*”⁴

122 To be “*surety*” means “to be a guarantee.”
 Be surety for Your servant for good; do not let the arrogant oppress me. Remember that he is meditating on the *ayin*, the fountain from which flows the character of God. And so he says, “Your character is the guarantee of ultimate good for Your servant.”⁵

The arrogant are his captors. “Do not let them overwhelm me,” he cries; “do not let me fall into their ambush!” In his mind, the captive knows that God has not lost control; but his faith is being tested by fire. And he is afraid that under the pressure of his enemies, he will compromise the Word or deny his faith.

123 As he stares out across the burning sand, he
 My eyes fail with longing for Your salvation and for Your righteous Word. thinks about how thirsty he is, not for water, but for the Word. “*My eyes fail*” is an idiom that means he keeps waiting and looking for something that has not come yet. He longs for *yeshuah*, salvation—not the eternal salvation he already possesses but deliverance through his trials.

He is not asking the Lord to snap His fingers and make the Babylonians disappear. What he wants is for God to revive him and give him strength to face his situation. He knows that as he recalls and applies the Word, he will be delivered through the devastation; and so he waits for the promises to be fulfilled.

Yeshuah means literally “salvation from God.” It is the Hebrew form of the name Jesus. Jesus Christ is salvation, and all the promises are fulfilled in Him.

124 Once more he turns to the concept of
 Deal with Your servant according to Your lovingkindness, and teach me Your statutes. manufacturing something from resources at hand. He asks God to make something for him out of the resource of His grace. That something is the “*good*” of verse 122. Grace

is the underserved favor of God. Because it is a gift, we can not earn it and we do not deserve it; we can only receive it by faith. But faith has to have an object. So he says, "Teach me Your Word!" In asking God to provide for him on the basis of grace and truth, he is asking for fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ: *"for the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ."*⁶

125 For the third time in this section, the author reminds the Lord that he is *His* servant. Physically he may be a slave of the Babylonians, but all his service belongs to God. Based on his relationship to God and his desire to do His will, he asks the Lord to give him understanding and knowledge.

"Understanding" is the ability to discern the times in which you live. The captive wants to know the Word and he wants to know how to apply it to his life, whether he is in the desert of Judea or the slave markets of Babylon. He wants to be like the sons of Isaachar who served King David—*"men who understood the times, with knowledge of what Israel should do."*⁷

126 Until the holocaust struck, no one in this young man's generation understood the times in which they lived. Jeremiah warned the nation that in turning away from God, they were forsaking the fountain of living waters and hewing for themselves broken cisterns that could hold no water. That fountain was the Holy One of Israel, the promised Messiah, Jesus Christ. Now that he has turned back to the Word, this captive sees the judgment of God from the divine perspective. He understand that it is *good* that God should bring discipline on His children and that His Word should be vindicated.⁸

127 Therefore I love Your
commandments
above gold, yes,
above fine gold.

The pressure in his life has only intensified his love for the Word of God. He understands now that faith, like gold, must be refined. The purifying of faith, like the purifying of gold, takes heat, pressure, and fire; but he is ready to endure because he knows what the outcome will be. Five hundred years after the Babylonian captivity, Peter would encourage a generation of suffering believers by reminding them that there was a purpose to their distress: *“that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”*⁹

128 Therefore I esteem
right all Your precepts
concerning everything, I
hate every false way.

Literally, this says, “I daily choose your precepts.” This is the beginning of his deliverance—his determination to follow the plan of God, to continuously drink from the fountain of living water.

The Lord is my Life

From the fountain of living water in my soul
I have manufactured justice
in the face of injustice
and righteousness to the unrighteous,
do not forsake me to my captors.

Your character is the guarantee
of ultimate good for Your servant,
do not let the proud
bring me to the point of compromise.

I look for deliverance until my eyes grow weary,
and I patiently wait to see Your promises fulfilled.

Out of Your great faithfulness,
manufacture conditions of grace to Your servant,
and teach me the truth of Your standards.

I am Your servant.

Give me discernment of the times in which I live,
that I may know in the face of historical crisis
how to be a testimony for You.

The time for divine intervention
in human history has come,
for they have violated Your law.

Like a fountain of refreshment in the wilderness,
I love your commands more than gold.
And, like gold in the furnace,
my faith is purified by fire.

Therefore I choose to walk
in the path of Your precepts daily,
and I hate every distraction from Your Word.



P The pe pictures an open mouth.
It represents spiritual hunger, the

hunger that can be satisfied only by the Word of God: "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God."

The Lord Jesus Christ has promised,
"Blessed are those

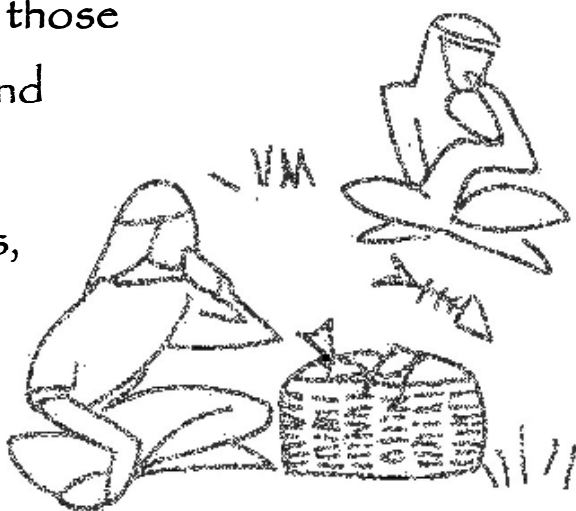
who hunger and
thirst for

righteousness,

for they

shall be

satisfied."¹



The unfolding of Your
words gives light; it
gives understanding
to the simple.

p

P · E

The LORD is my

SATISFACTION

129

Your testimonies
are wonderful;
therefore my soul
observes them.

Yesterday the captive had lingered all day at the fountain of the Word. Today he awakens to a banquet. He wakes up with the Word of God in his mouth and his first thought is of how wonderful it tastes. "Your Word," he says to the

Lord, "is marvelous, extraordinary, exceptional! I will apply it to my life!"

Every time the Word of God comes into our minds, we make a decision, just as we do every time we eat. When we put something in our mouths, we immediately know whether we like it. If we do not, we spit it out. If we do, we say, "Yes, I want more of this." When we say "yes" to the Word, when we respond in faith and say, "This satisfies me and gives me answers," then the process of digestion begins.

In the digestive process, the food we have eaten is broken down into the nutrients our bodies need in order to grow and function. Digestion turns food into usable strength. When we take the Word of God into the soul, it is broken down—digested—by faith to give us strength to go above and beyond any difficulty we face. The written Word is designed to reproduce the character of the living Word in our lives. Without faith, it is impossible to please God. Without spiritual digestion, the Word cannot be converted to power.²

The word “unfold” has many shades of meaning. It can mean “to open a door”—the Word of God opens doors of understanding to us. It can mean “to unsheathe a sword”—the Word of God is the sword of the Spirit, the weapon of spiritual advance. It can mean “to engrave on a tablet or a stone”—the Word of God is designed to be engraved on our souls. And, it can mean “to open the mouth in order to teach”—the opening of the mouth in the teaching of the Word gives light.

The “*simple*” are the untaught, the silly. “*Understanding*” means “discernment, strategy, the ability to think and to make right decision.” The digestion of the Word helps the untaught become wise. In his meditations the day before, the captive asked the Lord to give him understanding; as he feeds on the Word, God fulfills that desire.

131 The driving passion of this young man’s life is his hunger for the Word of God. To open his mouth wide, to pant, to long for—these are all expressions of intense desire. His mouth is open, ready to receive from God. Moses reminded the children of the Exodus generation that God had humbled His people and let them be hungry and fed them with manna all for a reason—*“that He might make [them] understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord.”*³

132 In his hunger for the grace of God, the captive has great confidence that he will be filled. Why? Because he knows God’s Word and God’s ways. He knows that nothing can separate him from the grace of God—nothing, that is, except his own choice to be negative to the Word.

The word “*manner*” refers to a law or a rule. God has bound Himself to act according to certain laws of his own establishment. When this young man cries out, “*Turn to me!*” he knows that God *will* turn to him, because He has given His Word. “*Those who honor Me,*” He promises, “*I will honor.*”⁴

The love he talks about here refers to fellowship. No matter how great our sin, when we confess we are immediately restored to fellowship. God is then able to deal with us according to the law by which He causes all things to work together for good to those who love Him.⁵

133 “*You cause my feet to stand. You cause me to be secured and stabilized in Your Word!*” the author says. “*Dominion*” means “control or rulership;” “*iniquity*” is “vanity, emptiness, worthlessness.” He is afraid that he will be drawn back by his own arrogance and his own lusts into the emptiness of independence from God. He has a tremendously humble attitude that says, “I have just gotten my life back on course, and You know that if I am left to myself, I will wander off track by tomorrow. Do not let me go my own way!” He is casting himself on the grace and faithfulness of God. He knows that God’s plan does not depend on man; it depends on God: “*Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass.*”⁶

134 He has just admitted that he needs God to Redeem me from the oppression of man, that I may keep Your precepts. deliver him from himself. Now he cries for deliverance from his enemies. When he looks into the eyes of his captors, he can see how precarious his existence is. Unless God protects him, he has no hope. And so he goes to the God who promised Jeremiah, “*I am with you to save you and deliver you ... I will redeem you from the grasp of the violent.*”⁷

135

Make Your face
shine upon Your
servant, and teach
me Your statutes.

In his meditation on the *pe*, the captive has fed on the Word and believed the promises of God. Now he waits for the blessings of God. He quotes from the Lord's instructions to Aaron and his sons: *"The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make His face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up His countenance on you, and give you peace." So they shall invoke My name on the sons of Israel, and I then will bless them.*"⁸

The psalmist tells us that God has exalted His Word above His very name. He blesses His Word wherever it is found. When our lives are filled with the Word, God *has* to bless us. Not because we are worthy, but because this is the manner of God. He has designed phenomenal blessings for every believer, but He has a rule for their appropriation—we must be hungry for the Word above all else. *"For I know the plans that I have for you," declares the Lord, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope ... And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.'*"⁹

136

My eyes shed
streams of water,
because they do not
keep Your law.

When God fills the captive's hunger, it only makes him more hungry. Now he yearns to see even his enemies feed on the truth. "As I look at my Babylonian captors," he says, "my eyes are like a running river because they do not know the Messiah. They have never tasted life."

The Lord is my Satisfaction

The decrees of Your mouth are satisfying,
therefore, my soul craves them.

The unsheathed sword of the Spirit
is engraved with divine light,
giving the untrained a wise strategy.

My mouth is open wide,
my soul craves Your commandments.
I know You will turn to me with grace,
for this is Your method
of dealing with those who love You.

Cause my footsteps to be stabilized
in the path of Your Word,
And let nothing vain or worthless
take rulership over me.

Though I am outwardly a slave,
let me not be a slave to sin. Ransom me
from the slave market of human oppression,
that I may represent You as a true ambassador.

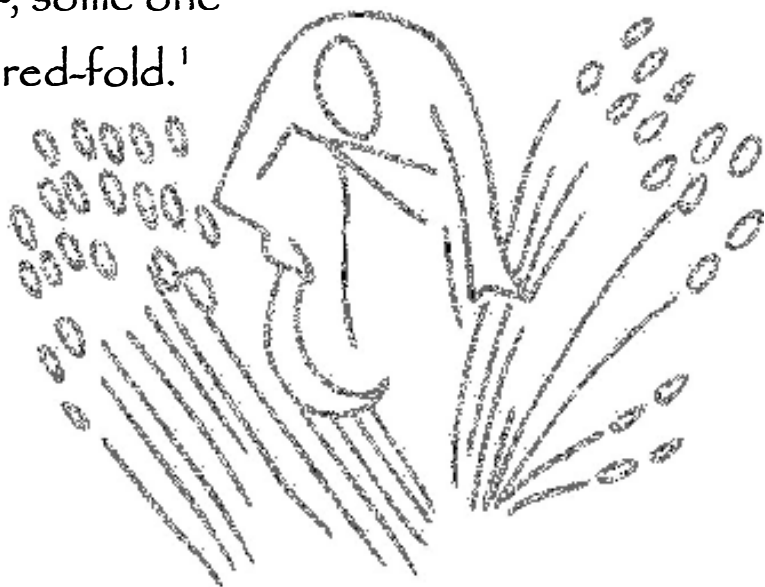
Cause the glory of Your essence
to be revealed to me,
and teach me Your standards.

My weeping is like a river
because there is no hunger for truth
among the sons of men.

p



The tsadhe pictures a reaping hook and represents the harvest of the Word of God. In the parable of the sower, Jesus promised that when the Word is sown in receptive hearts, it will always bear fruit—some thirty-, some sixty-, some one hundred-fold.'





T · S · A · D · H · E

The LORD is my
HUSBANDMAN

137 Righteous are You, O Lord, and upright are Your judgments. With his eyes, the captive peers out onto the barren Arabian desert; but with his soul, he sees the bounty of what God's Word can produce on fertile ground. As he pictures the reaping hook, his first thought is of God, who sows the seed. God is righteous—He is perfectly good and perfectly fair. In His fairness, He provides to this weary world His Word—which is the seed—and the individual freedom we need to choose what kind of ground the seed will fall on in our hearts.

"Upright" is from a word that means "to plow a straight row." Every farmer knows that the straighter the row, the easier the harvest. When this young man set his heart to meditating his way through the alphabet, the first word that came to his mind was "blessed." "How blessed are those," he said, "whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord." Blessed, blameless, and upright all come from the same root word. They all have to do with walking a straight path. At the cross, every human being makes a decision to take either the broad road that leads to destruction or the narrow path—the way of the Word—that leads to fellowship and growth and production.²

138 The captive turns now from the sower, God, You have commanded to the seed—the Word of God. “You, Lord,” Your testimonies in he says, “have appointed Your Word in righteousness and ex- righteousness and faithfulness.” From the ceeding faithfulness. perfect character of God, who is eternally faithful and who cannot lie, comes the perfect Word of God. In the natural realm, the power of growth is inherent in the seed. The same is true in the spiritual realm. When the seed of the Word finds good soil—when any promise of God is met with faith—God is always faithful to unleash the power. Every time.

The Apostle Paul declares that the Gospel *“is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.”* James calls the Word *“the seed whose fruit is righteousness.”*³

139 “Zeal” is a burning passion for something My zeal has consumed that is deeply loved. The love of this young me, because my man’s life is the Word of God. When he sees adversaries have the Word being treated with contempt, his forgotten Your words. grief and his indignation are almost enough to devour him. His words here echo a psalm that 600 years later would be recalled by the Lord’s disciples as they watched Jesus drive the moneychangers out of the temple.⁴

As the anger of Jesus Christ burned—not against pagans but against the people who were called by His name—so this captive’s anger burns, not against his captors but against his fellow slaves. The Babylonians are not his adversaries—they never had the Word of God. His adversaries are Jews who have turned aside from the path. Like the rocky soul in the parable, they heard the Word, but they had no firm root; and in affliction and persecution, they have fallen away.⁵

140 “Very pure” is from a word that means “to be Your Word is very refined in fire.” Adversity is the fire with pure, therefore Your which God refines faith. This young man is servant loves it. determined that he will not let affliction turn

him aside. Before his nation was destroyed, his heart had been like the thorny soil. He had let the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things choke out the Word. Now he is a slave. The fire of the Babylonian captivity has swept away all his distractions, and he says, "Your Word becomes more precious to me with every new pain. It is the only thing that matters in my life. My heart is fertile soil."⁶

141 After a seed takes root, it grows in the secrecy of I am small and the soil until, eventually, a sprout pushes its way despised, yet I out of the ground. The captive looks at himself as do not forget the world would see him—insignificant, worthless, Your precepts. despised. He is a tiny seedling, one believing slave cast into the great nation of Babylon. But he knows that the seed implanted in his heart carries within itself the power of germination. From the power of germination comes growth; from growth, production; out of production, harvest. From one seed may come 30, 60, 100 more seeds. "I am forgotten," he says, "but I will not forget Your Word."⁷

142 For the third time in his meditations on the Your righteousness is *tsadhe*, the captive turns to thoughts of an everlasting righteousness. First he acknowledged the righteousness, and righteousness that is the essence of God; from Your law is truth. this comes the righteousness of the Word. Now he talks about the righteousness that God places in every person who believes in Jesus Christ. The captive understands that this imputed righteousness will *never* be revoked. God's Word declares that this is an "*everlasting righteousness*," and God's Word is truth.⁸

143 As the young stalk grows, it is exposed to Trouble and anguish heat, winds, floods, and droughts. have come upon me; experience trouble is to be hard-pressed, yet Your command-ments are my delight.

mashed down, flattened. Anyone who has seen a corn field after a hail storm knows what this means. "*Anguish*" is internal distress. After the storms of life have pinned this young man to the ground, then come the inner conflicts, the struggles of mind and emotion. These are the words of someone who is in intense agony; he is gasping for life.

In his pain, what does the captive need? He needs intimacy, affection; he needs to be held. He says to God, "I am in anguish, but Your Word caresses my soul. It is my comfort in all the storms of my life." His trouble drives him to the truth, and the truth drives away the trouble. In the process, he is made strong.

144 Your testimonies are
righteous forever; give
me understanding
that I may live.

Finally, the captive calls for the harvest of righteousness in his life. He says, "Cause me to know how to apply Your Word, that I may live the abundant, productive life You have promised to all who trust in You." He is ready for the harvest that is guaranteed to the mature believer. It is a harvest of blessing—of inner happiness and peace, joy and tranquility, power and stability. "I want the blessing," he says. "I want the harvest; I want to be productive. I want my life to count for something. Do not let me go down in history as a nothing."

The Lord is my Husbandman

You are a righteous husbandman, O Lord,
all Your sowing is in straight rows.

The seed of Your Word is sown
in perfection and faithfulness
in the souls of men.

The passion for Your Word devours me,
because Your people have fallen away.
In the rocky soil of their hearts,
Your Word cannot take root.

The seed of truth is purified
under exposure to the elements,
therefore, my love for it constantly increases.

I am like a small forgotten seed in a trampled field,
yet my persistence in Your Word
will cause me to bear fruit.

Your imputed righteousness is unconditional,
and Your laws will show me how to grow.

The storms of life, the driving wind and rain,
have flattened me,
but Your Word will caress me
like the sun breaking through the clouds.

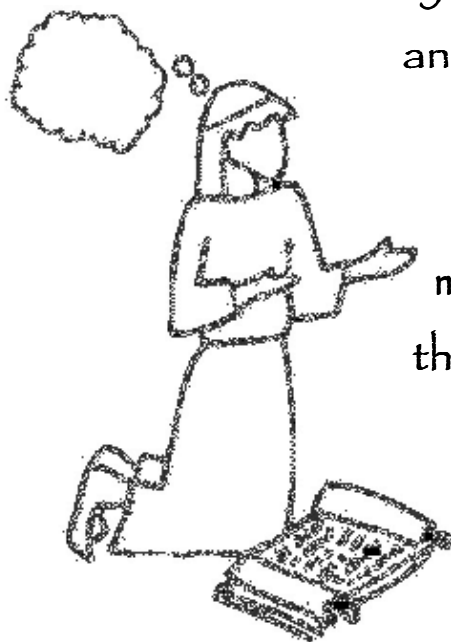
Your testimonies are eternally right,
and they cause me to come to the harvest
of spiritual maturity and great blessing.





The qoph pictures the back of the head. It represents thinking on the past—reviewing, reflecting, remembering. We are urged to take inventory or, to think on, the Word of God: “Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there

is any excellence
and if anything
worthy of
praise, let your
mind dwell on
these things.”¹





Q · O · P · H

The LORD is my

REFLECTION

145 Awakening to the cries of sick and dying slaves

I cried with all my heart; answer me, O Lord! I will observe Your statutes.

all around him, the captive turns to the *qoph* and remembers his own screams of desperation. In the days before Babylon besieged Jerusalem, he and his friends had mocked Jeremiah and scorned his message; but the prophet never quit warning that destruction was coming. At some point—perhaps as he watched his family starve to death in the famine, saw his friends murdered and mutilated in the streets, or saw the temple and the city he loved torched—this young man remembered something Jeremiah had taught.

The prophet had declared that God is always available and had urged the people to remember God's Word when the destruction inevitably came: *"You will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart."*²

146 "I cried to You then," he says to the Lord,

I cried to You; save me, and I shall keep Your testimonies.

"now, save me this day. Deliver me so that I may live according to Your Word." Without a Bible, without a teacher, how will he be able to live according to the Word? He will have to *remember* what he has been taught, and so he turns to the exercise of disciplined prayer.

147

I rise before
dawn and cry for
help; I wait for
Your words.

At the end of every day, the slaves—exhausted from their tortuous march across the desert—would be kept awake far into the night. Their captors found sport in abusing them and then forcing them to sing songs of Zion. Physically, this young man is at the mercy of the soldiers; but spiritually, he is free. They can torture him, but they cannot stop him from taking advantage of the marvelous privilege of prayer. As a child of God, he has the right to boldly approach the throne of God to find mercy and grace in his time of need.³

Bitter experience has taught him that the best time to call for help is *before* he needs it. So every day, before the sun rises, he prays for strength just for that day. “Help me *today!*” he cries. “How can I walk all the miles across the desert? How can I take the insults and the abuse? How can I endure the thirst and the hunger and the chafing of the chains around my legs and around my neck? Help me!”

“Wait,” again, is the Hebrew word for “healing.” When everything looks hopeless, the captive has hope because he is claiming promises. The wounds of life can always be healed by faith in the Word of God.

148

My eyes anticipate
the night watches,
that I may meditate
on Your Word.

Every three hours throughout the night, before the changing of the guards, the captive turns to prayer. While the others linger in desperately needed sleep, he denies himself physical rest in order to lay hold of spiritual rest. His prayers are based on his recall of the Word. In his meditations on the *qoph*, he declares that he *guards* the Word; he *treasures* the Word; he *hopes* in the Word; and he *concentrates* on the Word. Because his mind is stayed on the Word, he has peace and stability that no one can understand.⁴

149

Hear my voice,
according to Your
lovingkindness; revive
me, O Lord, according
to Your ordinances.

Now he asks the Lord to restore him to spiritual vigor, to open his eyes and his heart to the Word and the plan of God. He bases his request on two things that to man's way of thinking would be at odds—grace and judgment.

God's lovingkindness is His grace; His ordinances are his judgments. Grace always offers the solution to man's problems, but it is judgment that often provides the motivation to accept the solution. This young man knows from experience that as long as we feel sufficient within ourselves, we will not look to God for answers. So God allows us to make bad decisions; those decisions bring judgment; and judgment opens our eyes to our need for the Word. The pain drives us to the cure.

150

Those who follow
after wickedness
draw near; they are
far from Your law.

Perhaps at this point he sees soldiers coming toward him. Aggravated by the fact that they have not been able to break him yet, they may have decided that now is the time to bring all their evil devices to bear on him. These men who chase after wickedness have set their sights on him, and he can do nothing to stop them.

151

You are near, O
Lord, and all Your
commandments
are truth

He cannot stop his enemies, but he can call on God to stand with him. *"The Lord is near to all who call upon Him,"* David declares, *"to all who call upon Him in truth. He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him; he will also hear their cry and will save them. The Lord keeps all who love Him; but all the wicked, He will destroy."*⁵

The captive is saying that no matter how close trouble comes, it can never overcome God. "As long as You are here," he says, "and as long as I have Your presence with me, I do not care how close danger comes because the nearness of God is my good."⁶

152

Of old I have known
from Your testimonies,
that You have founded
them forever.

As he closes his meditations on the *qoph*, the captive looks back to his childhood, to the earliest memories he has of the Word of God. At some point in that past, he came to understand and to accept God's offer of salvation. He heard the Word taught by one of the greatest teachers his nation ever knew. And though for a time he turned away from the Word, the Word never turned away from him and never will!

The Lord is my Reflection

I have cried out with my whole heart,
O Lord, answer me!
I will scrutinize Your statutes.

I have cried to You, deliver me
and I will stand guard over your testimonies.

I rise before the dawning of the day
and cry for deliverance.
My soul languishes, hoping in Your Word.

I awaken before the calling of the night watches,
for a time of reflection in Your Word.

Give heed to my voice
because of Your loyal love, O Lord.
Revive my soul by Your judgment.

Those who pursue viciousness are drawing near,
but they are far from Your Word.

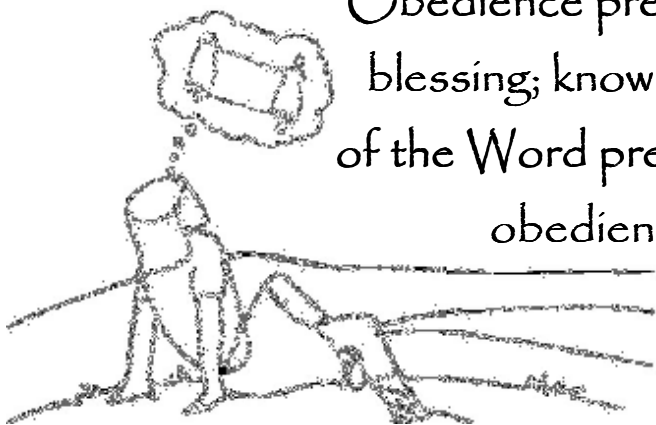
However, You are near to me, O Lord,
and all Your commands are truth.

From my childhood I have known Your testimonies,
for You laid the foundation of them in eternity.



¶ The resh pictures the front of the head. It represents thinking based on knowledge. We are commanded to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, that we may prove what the will of God is. Renewal of the mind comes through the Word of God. Jesus said of His teachings, "If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them."

Obedience precedes blessing; knowledge of the Word precedes obedience.¹





R · E · S · H
The LORD is my
MEDITATION

153 As he stares into the impenetrable Arabian sky, the captive begins his meditation on the affliction and rescue *resh* with a plea: “Look down on my life, Lord. See that your perspective has become mine, and rescue me from my affliction!”

Look upon my affliction and rescue me, for I do not forget Your law.

Not so many days ago, this young man was saying that it was good that he was afflicted. Why is he now asking for deliverance from the very affliction he had been thankful for? Because he knows that the work God sent the affliction to do in his life has been accomplished. He has been refined by the fires of adversity and his thinking has changed.

In the ancient refining pot, raw gold was melted by fire. As the gold became molten, impurities rose to the top and the goldsmith skimmed them off and then turned up the heat. More impurities rose and were skimmed off and the heat was turned up higher. At each stage, the gold became more pure. The goldsmith knew his work was done when he could look into the pot and see his face reflected in the liquid gold.

This young man, who before the fall of his nation had been indifferent to the Word, has been purified by fire. Day after cruel day, he has focused not on his trouble but on God’s truth. That focus has brought him to the point where he has the mind of Christ. He can say, “Lord, look into my soul and see Your face reflected.”²

154 “Be my redeemer, my champion,” he says, Plead my cause and redeem me; revive me according to Your Word. echoing the words of Jeremiah, who knew what it was like to have no one but the Lord on his side. At a time when everyone was turning against him, the prophet declared, *“The Lord is with me like a dread champion.”* Jeremiah had many enemies; there were multitudes who wished him dead. But he knew that no matter how close his enemies came, Jesus Christ was always closer.³

155 He bases his plea for deliverance on the fact that Salvation is far from the wicked, for they do not seek Your statutes. he does not neglect the Word of God; therefore, he is confident that the Lord will be his champion. But he knows that the Lord does not champion the cause of every man. There is one type of man for whom there is no salvation—the wicked, the one who does not see his need for God and has no desire to know His Word.

Attitude toward the Word of God is everything in life. To the unbeliever who turns away from God’s offer of life, there is no eternal salvation. To the believer who turns away from God’s offer of abundant life, there is no fellowship and no daily deliverance.

156 Great are Your mercies, O Lord; revive me according to Your ordinances. Thinking about the wicked and their disdain for the Word causes the author to remember the abundant mercies of the Lord. He was once one of the wicked; he knows that he still is an incorrigible sinner who, like all men, is helpless to make himself right with God. But he knows that God has mercy, that quality which causes Him to withhold from us the judgment we deserve. Because he poured out all judgment for sin on His son, He is able and willing to bless all who respond to His Word.

This young man is winning an awesome victory. He is refusing to give in to human ways of thinking. Instead, he is looking at his circumstances with the mind of Christ, which is the Word of God. *"For the weapons of our warfare," Paul wrote, "are not of the flesh but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ."*⁴

157 His persecutors and his adversaries are many; but no matter how threatening and my adversaries, they appear to him, the captive will not yet I do not turn aside from let his mind be deflected from the Word. Your testimonies. *"Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth," Paul urged the Colossian believers. That is just what this young man has determined to do. Seven times a day, he stops everything to praise God; all day long he meditates, he drinks from the fountain of the Word. Because he has learned to focus on the Word and to walk by faith, not by sight, he can face his oppressors with courage and confidence.*⁵

158 As he looks on those who would destroy him, the captive burns with the indignation I behold the treacherous and loathe them, because they do not keep Your Word. of the Lord. He sees these treacherous men as God sees them; he understands how loathsome their disregard is for the Word and for the One who has spoken it. David said of the enemies of God, *"Do I not hate those who hate You, O Lord? And do I not loathe those who rise up against You? I hate them with the utmost hatred; they have become my enemies."*⁶

159 If we love God, we will hate what He hates and treasure what He treasures. *"If you love Me," Jesus told His disciples, "you will keep My commandments."* To love the Lord is to Consider how I love Your precepts; revive me, O Lord, according to Your lovingkindness.

treasure His Word; to despise His Word is to despise Him.⁷

For the third time in his meditations on the *resh*, the captive calls on God to revive him—to give him abundant life even in the midst of his captivity. The first time he asked for revival according to God’s promises. The second time he asked for revival according to God’s judgments—the discipline that He uses to bring His children back into line. This time he asks according to God’s unmerited favor, the grace He is always ready to pour out on any who are ready to receive.

160 “Every word that comes out of Your mouth,” the captive says, “is true, certain and faithful.” “*Truth*” is from *amen*, the Hebrew word for “leaning faith.” In unbelievably uncertain and volatile circumstances, this young man has absolute stability because he sees with the eyes and thinks with the mind of God.

At the end of Psalm 139—in which he vented his loathing for the enemies of God—David pled, “*Search me, O God, and know my heart. Try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way.*”⁸

The Lord is my Meditation

Look upon the face of my affliction
and rescue me,
for I do not forget Your law.

Champion my cause and redeem me,
by Your Word revive my soul.

The wicked are far from deliverance,
for they do not seek out Your statutes.

Your tender mercies are multiplied, O Lord,
revive my soul according to Your judgments.

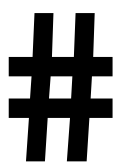
My persecutors are also multiplied
along with my enemies,
yet I do not turn my face from Your testimonies.

I looked on the traitors and was grieved
because they guard not Your Word.

Consider how I have loved Your precepts, O Lord,
revive my soul by Your loyal love.

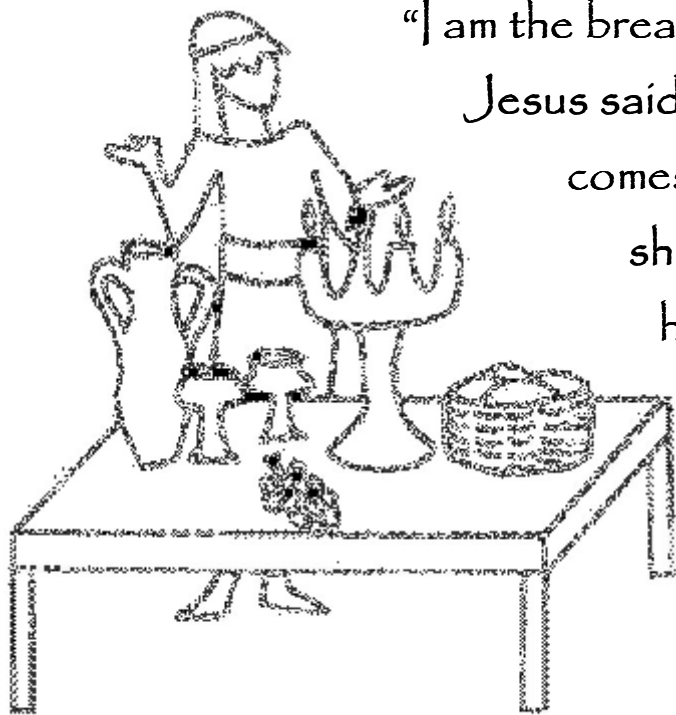
The sum total of Your Word is truth,
and every one of Your
righteous judgments is eternal.





The shin pictures a mouth, an open, smiling mouth with a tooth in it. It represents spiritual feasting—feeding on the Word of God—and the satisfaction that inevitably follows.

“I am the bread of life,”
Jesus said, “he who
comes to Me
shall not
hunger.”¹





S · H · I · N
The LORD is my
FEAST

161 David wrote the most beloved of all his songs, Psalm 23, after he had been driven from Jerusalem by a revolt led by his own son. Deprived of his crown, his thrown, and his home, and separated from the house of God, the shepherd of Israel declared his absolute confidence in the Shepherd of his soul. As he looked out on the valley that could soon become the valley of his death, David saw not enemies to be feared, but a table set with the Word to be enjoyed. *"You have prepared a table before me in the presence of my enemies,"* he said.²

As another day's trek toward Babylon begins and the captives file past those who now rule over them, this young man prepares for the same feast David enjoyed in his wilderness. *"Persecute"* means "to pursue to chase, to hound." This young man, in an intensely hostile environment, looks at his enemies and sees only the bounty of God. He trembles in reverence for the Word of God.

162 Remember that he is chained neck-to-neck to I rejoice at Your hundreds, perhaps thousands, of bloody, Word as one who starving, distressed slaves. Those who have any finds great spoil. strength at all are forced to carry on their backs the plunder the persecutors took from their homes and their temple. Yet in all this, the author sees himself as the victor and the Word of God as his plunder.

As he recalls the Word, he rejoices. He exults as one who, having valiantly fought against an enemy, enters the conquered city and finds wealth beyond his wildest imagination plus a great banquet table set and ready to enjoy. There is wine to cheer his soul and all manner of food to delight his palate and nourish his body.

163 With the hatred that one has for an enemy who I hate and despise is repulsive, sinister, and extremely dangerous, falsehood, but I this young man abhors everything that is love Your law. contrary to the truth. He has good reason to be vehement—false teaching had brought his nation down. As Jeremiah warned of impending judgment, Judah's prophets were saying God would not bring sword or famine. *"They heal the brokenness of the daughter of My people superficially."* The Lord declared, *"saying, 'Peace, peace,' but there is no peace."* This young man understands that to survive in this crisis, he must feed continually and exclusively on the truth.³

164 Seven times a day—morning, noon, evening, and at the four watches in the night—the Seven times a day I praise You, because captive stops everything to praise God. The of Your righteous Hebrew *halal* means "to celebrate, to glory." ordinances. It is from a verb that means "to boast." Why does he stop every three hours to praise? Literally, *"because Your judgments are righteous."* He celebrates because God was right in bringing calamity on his nation. But he also can celebrate because he knows that external circumstances cannot disturb internal blessings. God is faithful to bless faith wherever He finds it.

165 In the physical realm, exercise creates the demand that converts food to energy. If we Those who love Your law have great peace, eat and do not exercise, we grow fat. In the and nothing causes spiritual realm, faith is the exercise that them to stumble. converts the Word into energy for life.

Because this young man applies what he knows of the Word every day, he can say from experience, “Peace is magnified to those who love You.” *Shalom* is the inner peace and tranquility that is the birthright of every believer. The Lord wants us to have peace *with* God—salvation; peace *from* God—the fruit of study of the Word; and the peace *of* God—the rest that results from living by faith. Nothing can stop the advance of those who actively love the Word of God.⁴

166 The word “*hope*” here means “to scrutinize or watch,” therefore “to anticipate or expect.” As he scrutinizes the Word of God hidden in his soul, what is he anticipating? The fulfillment of God’s promise of salvation. He is waiting to be delivered through his calamity by the God of Israel, the Lord of hosts. Four hundred years before the birth of the Messiah in a cave in Bethlehem, this young slave is putting all his hope in the One whose name he does not even know he knows—*Yeshuah*, the Lord Jesus Christ.⁵

From the scrutiny of and his faith in the Word, the captive manufactures truth. As he expressed in the *ayin* section, he takes the existing materials of the essence of God and, by faith, replicates the character of God on earth.

167 “My soul treasures Your testimonies,” he says. “I love them without bounds,” We guard what we value. This young man did not always love or value the Word. Perhaps he did as a child; but at some point he turned negative, and he stayed that way until after God’s discipline hit. But when he turned his heart around, all he had studied began to come back to him; he began to recognize that the only thing he had that his enemies could not take from him was the Word of God. As he fed on the Word day after day, he fell more and more deeply in love.

168

I keep Your precepts
and Your testimonies,
for all my ways are
before You.

The captives are drawing very near to the end of their journey toward Babylon. This young man stands at the edge of darkness. He has no idea what tomorrow will bring or where it will lead, but he is not afraid. *"Does He not see*

my ways and number my steps?" Job had said as he stood in his own darkness. *"All my paths are seen by You,"* the captive says. He knows that everywhere he goes, the Lord goes ahead of him. The Lord knows every need he will ever have and He has already set aside provision for a continual feast.⁶

The Lord is my Feast

I am hounded and persecuted by rulers unjustly,
yet my heart is filled with reverence for Your Word.

My soul leaps for joy at Your Word,
as one who finds a banquet table
set amid the spoil.

I have and reject false doctrine as my enemy,
but I love Your law.

Seven times each day
I will glorify You with praise,
because your judgment is righteous.

Inner peace is magnified
to the ones who love Your law,
and no obstacle can stand before them.

I anticipate Your deliverance, O Lord,
and I perform Your commandments.

My soul guards as a treasure Your testimonies,
my love for them exceeds all bounds.

I will guard Your precepts and Your principles,
all my future paths are known to You.





The tav pictures a signature. It represents identification. The author of this psalm signs off by identifying himself as the lost sheep. “I am the good shepherd,” Jesus declared.



“The good shepherd
lays down His life
for the sheep ...
My sheep hear my
voice, and I know
them, and they
follow Me ... and no one
shall snatch them out
of My hand.”¹



T · A · V
The LORD is my
SHEPHERD

169 As the captives were dragged the last few

Let my cry come
before You, O Lord,
and give me under-
standing according to
Your Word.

miles of their journey from Jerusalem, the terrible city loomed before them—Babylon the Great, feared and envied by every nation on earth. A wall 300 feet high and 80 feet thick ran for 60 miles around the city. Through 100

gates of brass, hundreds of thousands of people moved in and out of the metropolis every day.

The slaves approached the city in a line stretching perhaps for miles. The nearer they came, the more they jostled with the increasingly frenzied crowds rushing in and out of what was considered the center of the universe, the most exciting city in the world.

As terrible as things had been so far for the captives, at least they had been in familiar territory. They were Israelites, after all; they understood the desert. Now they are truly in a strange land, and so the author begins his meditation on the *tav* with the bleating of a sheep in the wilderness.

Sheep are the most helpless of animals. They are stupid, stubborn, and notoriously easy to intimidate. They have no sense of direction; so when they wander off and become lost, all they can do is bleat and hope the shepherd will hear. The captive's cry here, literally, is for wisdom—the skill of applying the Word of God in life.

170 As he looks toward the menacing city, the captive remembers that the Lord *is* his Shepherd, and he claims a promise from the Word. The Hebrew for “*deliver*” means “to pluck from danger.” It was the shepherd’s responsibility to rescue his sheep when they were threatened. Over and over again, God promised through His prophets to deliver His people. “*Listen to Me,*” He declared through Isaiah; “*even to your old age, I shall be the same, and even to your graying years I shall bear you! I have done it, and I shall carry you; and I shall bear you, and I shall deliver you.*” This young man is clutching the Word. “You promised,” he says, “that You would deliver me.”²

171 The first sounds out of his mouth this morning were the anxious bleats of a lonely and frightened lamb. Now, comforted by his certainty that the Shepherd will deliver him, he utters the peaceful sounds of praise. “*You teach me,*” he says. He knows his Shepherd. He has seen the heart of the one of whom Isaiah had written: “*Like a shepherd He will tend His flock, in His arm He will gather the lambs, and carry them in his bosom.*” He knows that his Shepherd will be faithful to do for him all the things he cannot do for himself.³

172 The more he focuses on the Word, the greater his joy. First he cried, then he praised—now he sings. Marching toward the darkness of Babylon, this young man has a song in his heart! He is in chains, yet he knows that he is the invader because he carried into the center of Satan’s domain the light of the righteous Word of God.

173 The hand represents the strength of the Shepherd

Let Your hand be ready to help me, for I have chosen Your precepts.

and His ability and willingness to deliver His sheep. “*Help*” is from a word that means “to surround.” This young man is no more able to deliver himself than is a lamb in a thicket. He is in chains, surrounded by and under the absolute control of abusive people. He is totally helpless. But he knows that no matter where he is, he will always be in the hands of God.

Why does he think God should help him? Because he has chosen God’s Word. “I am constantly feeding on Your Word,” he says. Every day of his captivity he has chosen to recall, to believe, and to apply the Word of God; and so he can be confident that he will be delivered.

174 Sheep are prone to panic, even when there is

I long for Your salvation, O Lord, and Your law is my delight.

nothing to be afraid of. So shepherds must spend a good deal of their time talking to the sheep, singing to them, soothing them. David even played his harp for them. Like sheep, believers are prone to fear. With every breath this young man takes, he craves the salvation of God. Because he understands with all his being how absolutely helpless he is, he is overwhelmed by his desire for deliverance moment-by-moment. He needs deliverance—from his guards, from other slaves, and most of all, from his own sin nature.

He knows that he has two choices: he can panic or he can hold on to the Word. He chooses to hold on. As he does, he remembers the delight that is his every time he draws the Word close to himself. Only the voice of the Shepherd can calm the hearts of the sheep.⁴

175 This young man had seen many of his fellow

Let my soul live that it may praise You, and let Your ordinances help me.

captives perish on the way to Babylon. His own life appears to hang by a thread; but because he has focused on the Word, he

knows that God is in control. And so he cries for the Lord to preserve his life for one reason—so that he can praise and glorify God in a pagan land.

176 Here, finally, is the captive's signature. "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek Your servant, for I do not forget Your commandments. I have wandered, I have strayed off the path," he says, "*like a lost sheep. Seek Your servant!*" Again and again throughout his meditations, the captive has remembered God's promise to Jeremiah and has sought the Lord with all his heart. His final act is to throw himself on the grace and mercy of the Good Shepherd. So he ends not with *his* pursuit of the Lord, but with *the Lord's* pursuit of him.⁵

Years later, God would use one of the young men who survived this death march to describe the work of the coming Messiah: "*I shall deliver My flock ... I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out ... I will care for My sheep and will deliver them ... I will feed My flock and I will lead them to rest ... I will seek the lost, bring back the scattered, bind up the broken, and strengthen the sick ... Then they will know that I am the Lord.*"⁶

The Lord is my Shepherd

Hear the cry of Your lost sheep, O Lord,
and grant me wisdom according to Your Word,
for Your sheep hear Your voice and follow You.

Let my request come before Your face,
and deliver me by the rod and the staff of Your Word.

My lips glorify You
because You instruct me in divine truths.
When I hear Your Word,
my tongue sings praises in the wilderness,
for all Your commands are righteous.

Let your hand be ready
to strengthen and stabilize me,
for I feed in the pasture of Your precepts.

I long for the still water of Your salvation, O Lord,
and Your law causes me to frolic in the morning dew.

Let my soul live that I may glorify You,
and sustain me by Your judgments.

I have wandered far afield like a lost sheep.
Come seeking Your servant,
for I long for the fold of Your commandments.



Psalm 126

Thanksgiving for Return from Captivity

A Song of Ascents

WHEN THE LORD brought back the captive ones of Zion,
We were like those who dream.

2 Then our mouth was filled with laughter,
And our tongue with joyful shouting,
Then they said among the nations,
“The Lord has done great things for them.”

3 The Lord has done great things for us,
We are glad.

4 Restore our captivity, O Lord,
As the streams in the South.

5 Those who sow in tears shall reap with joyful shouting.
He who goes to and fro weeping, carrying his bag of seed,

6 Shall indeed come again with a shout of joy,
bringing his sheaves with him.

Scripture References

Introduction

- 1 Lam. 2
- 2 2 Kings 25:1-7
- 3 2 Kings 25:8-21
Lam. 5
- 4 Psa. 137
- 5 Jer. 2:13
- 6 Jer. 2:19
- 7 Jer. 6:16
Jer. 7:23-24
- 8 Jer. 8:13
Jer. 6:19
- 9 2 Kings 24:8-20
- 10 Lam. 1:1
- 11 Lam. 1:9
Lam. 2:11
- 12 Lam. 3:1-16
- 13 Lam. 3:16-18
- 14 Lam. 3:21-24
- 15 Lam. 3:25
- 16 Matt. 19:26
Heb. 4:2-3; 11:6
- 17 Dan. 1, 3, 6
- 18 Dan. 4
- 19 John 1:1-5
Rev. 1:8; 21:6; 22:13
- 20 Col. 1:15-18

Aleph

- 1 Eph. 1:3-14
- 2 2 Tim. 3:16-17
1 John. 1:7-10
Gal. 5:16
- 3 Deut. 4:29-31
Jer. 29:11-14
- 4 1 John 1:9
Psa. 51
Phil. 3:13-14
- 5 Rom. 10:17
- 6 Deut. 11:8-9
(und. added)
- 7 Heb. 4:12-13
- 8 Jos. 1:5
Heb. 13:5

Beth

- 1 John 8:31-32
John 15:7
Psa. 91
- 2 Luke 7:44

Beth (cont.)

- 3 John 13:10
1 John 1:6-10
- 4 Luke 15:10-32
- 5 Mat. 6:19-21
Prov. 24:3-4
- 6 Luke 7:36-50
Prov. 24:4

Gimel

- 1 Phil. 4:19
Mat. 6:26
2 Cor. 9:8
- 2 Isa. 55:10-11
- 3 John 10:10
Deu. 8:3
Mat. 4:4
- 4 Col. 2:3
Mat. 7:7-8
- 5 Heb. 12:5-11
- 6 Psa. 23:1
from the Hebrew
(und. added)
- 7 Phi. 4:6

Daleth

- 1 Col. 2:3
John 10:9
Psa. 25
Isa. 48:17-18
- 2 1 John 5:14-15
John 14:13
- 3 Isa. 30:18
Heb. 11:6
2 Pet. 1:4
- 4 Mat. 7:7-11
- 5 Psa. 25:4
Psa. 32:8
- 6 Jer. 6:16
Mat. 11:28-30
- 7 John 14:26
John 16:13
- 8 John 3:16
John 3:6
1 Cor. 2:12
John 15:26-27
- 9 Hab. 2:4
Rom. 1:17
Gal. 3:11
Heb. 10:38
- 10 Deu. 8:3
Mat. 4:4

He

- 1 Isa. 55:8-9
1 Cor. 2:16
- 2 John 15:5
- 3 Rom. 12:1-3
Rom. 3:23-24
- 4 Eph. 2:8-10
- 5 Luke 10:38-42
- 6 Jer. 6:13; 8:10
- 7 1 Sam. 17:47
- 8 Phil. 4:13

Vav

- 1 1 Pet. 1:24-25
Heb. 6:18
Heb. 13:8
Eph. 1:12-14
Eccl. 12:11
- 2 Isa. 33:6
Psa. 37:24
- 3 1 Pet. 2:4-8
John 1:1-5, 14
Isa. 26:4
1 Cor. 3:11
1 Cor. 10:4
1 Pet. 5:7
- 4 1 Pet. 5:7
- 5 James 1:22-25
- 6 Eph. 3:18-19
- 7 2 Cor. 5:20-21

Zayin

- 1 Eph. 6:17
2 Pet. 3:18
Heb. 4:12-13
- 2 Lam. 3:21-24
- 3 John 14:26
John 16:14
2 Tim. 2:15
2 Tim. 1:14
Gal. 5:16-17
2 Cor. 5:7
Prov. 3:5-6
- 4 Psa. 138:2
from the Hebrew

Heth

- 1 1 Pet 1:3-5
Col. 3:23-24
- 2 Lam. 3:24
Psa. 16:5-6, 11
Psa. 73:25-26
- 3 Num. 13

Heth (cont.)

- 4 Josh. 1:3
- 5 Josh. 14:6–15
- 6 Mark 4:18–19
Heb. 12:1
2 Tim. 2:4
1 Cor. 15:33
2 Cor. 6:14
- 7 Rom. 8:28

Teth

- 1 John 1:12; 10:28
- 2 Gen. 50:20
Rom. 8:28
- 3 Heb. 5:14
- 4 Heb. 12:6
1 Pet. 5:6
Rev. 3:19
- 5 Psa. 145:9, 17
- 6 Heb. 12:11
Jer. 33:3
Matt. 5:6
Luke 1:53
- 7 Matt. 5:11–12
- 8 Deut. 33:27
- 9 Heb. 12:2
Col. 3:1–4
Col. 1:15–18
Psa. 37:23–24

Yodh

- 1 Eph. 2:10
2 Tim. 2:20–21
1 Pet. 2:4–10
Psa. 138:8
- 2 Psa. 139:13–15
- 3 Col. 2:10
1 Cor. 10:13
- 4 Eph. 1:18–19
- 5 2 Cor. 4:8–9
Job 13:15
- 6 Psa. 145:17
- 7 Jer. 31:3
Psa. 103:13–14
2 Cor. 1:3–7
- 8 Psa. 27:4
- 9 1 Pet. 3:15

Kaph

- 1 James 4:6
Luke 1:53
Matt. 5:6
Jer. 33:3
- 2 2 Cor. 1:3–7
Rom. 15:4–5

Kaph (cont.)

- sa. 51:12
- 3 Heb. 4:12
2 Cor. 7:6
John 14:16–17, 26
- 4 Psa. 90:12
from the Hebrew
Psa. 139:16
Eph. 5:15–17
- 5 Psa. 119:30
Psa. 23:4
- 6 Deut. 31:6–8
Jos. 1:5
Heb. 13:5, 6

Lamedh

- 1 2 Tim. 2:14
Eccl. 12:11
Acts 26:14
Heb. 4:11
- 2 Isa. 40:8
1 Pet. 1:23–25
Luke 21:33
from the Greek
- 3 James 1:17
Heb. 13:8
Heb. 11
- 4 Jer. 16:13
Jer. 31:13–14
- 5 Psa. 100:3
Psa. 23
- 6 Matt. 5:6
Matt. 7:7–8
Jer. 29:13

Mem

- 1 Eph. 5:25–26
John 7:37
Psa. 36:8–9
- 2 Psa. 63:1
- 3 Psa. 1:1–3
Jer. 17:8
- 4 John 14:15
- 5 Mat. 10:16
- 6 1 John 1:7–10
- 7 Isa. 58:10–11
- 8 Psa. 19:10
- 9 Jude 12
2 Pet. 2:17

Nun

- 1 Heb. 3:1, 12:1–3
- 2 Pro. 6:23
- 3 1 John 1:5
Eph. 5:8

Nun (cont.)

- 2 Cor. 4:6
- 4 1 Thess. 5:24
- 5 1 Cor. 10:13
(und. added)
- 6 Psa. 19:14
Heb. 13:15
Psa. 50:23
- 7 Rom. 13:12, 14
Phil. 2:15
Matt. 5:14
- 8 Phil. 3:7–11
- 9 1 Pet. 1:23–25

Samekh

- 1 Eph. 3:20
- 2 James 1:6–8, 4:8
- 3 Psa. 32:7–8
Heb. 6:18
- 4 Matt. 16:23
(und. added)
1 Cor. 15:33
- 5 Isa. 40:29–31
from the Hebrew
- 6 Jer. 17:5–7
2 Cor. 12:9–10
- 7 Prov. 9:10
- 8 Matt. 5:3
Mark 9:23

Ayin

- 1 John 4:14
John 7:38
Psa. 36:7–9
Isa. 12:3
- 2 Isa. 64:6
Jer. 17:9
Psa. 14:1–3
- 3 John 6:29
Eph. 2:8–10
- 4 Heb. 13:5
Josh. 1:5, 9
- 5 Gen. 50:20
Rom. 8:28
- 6 John 1:14, 16–17
- 7 1 Chron. 12:32
- 8 Jer. 2:13
- 9 1 Pet. 1:7–8
Isa. 48:10

Pe

- 1 Matt. 4:4
Matt. 5:6
Deut. 8:3
Psa. 41:1–2

Pe (cont.)

- 2 Rom. 12:2
Heb. 11:6
Heb. 5:12–14
- 3 Deut. 8:3
- 4 1 Sam. 2:30
James 4:8
Rom. 8:28
- 5 1 Thess. 5:24
- 6 Jer. 15:20–21
- 7 Num. 6:24–27
- 8 Psa. 138:2
Matt. 6:33
Jer. 29:11, 13

Tsadhe

- 1 Mark 4:1–20
John 15:5
James 1:21
James 3:18
- 2 Psa. 119:1
Psa. 1:1–3
Matt. 7:13–13
- 3 Rom. 1:16
James 3:18
Psa. 97:11
- 4 John 2:13–17
Psa. 69:9
- 5 Mark 4:5–6, 16–17
- 6 Mark 4:7, 18–19
- 7 Mark 4:20
- 8 Gen. 15:6
John 17:17

Qoph

- 1 Phil. 4:8
- 2 Jer. 29:13
- 3 Psa. 137
Heb. 4:16
- 4 Isa. 26:3
- 5 Psa. 145:18–20
- 6 Psa. 73:25, 28

Resh

- 1 Rom. 12:2
John 13:17
- 2 1 Pet. 1:7–8
- 3 Jer. 50:34
Jer. 20:11
- 4 1 Cor. 2:16
2 Cor. 10:4–5
- 5 Col. 3:1–3
2 Cor. 5:6–7
- 6 Psa. 139:21

Resh (cont.)

- 7 John 14:15
- 8 Psa. 139:23–24

Shin

- 1 John 6:33–35
John 6:47–48, 50
Jer. 31:13–14
- 2 Psa. 23:1, 5
- 3 Rom. 12:9
Jer. 14:13–14
Jer. 6:14
Jer. 8:8–11
- 4 John 14:27
John 16:33
Rom. 5:1
2 Pet. 1:2
Phil. 4:6–7
- 5 Luke 1:68–75
- 6 Job 31:4

Tav

- 1 John 10:11, 27–28
- 2 Isa. 46:3–4
- 3 Isa. 40:11
- 4 Phil. 4:6–7
- 5 Jer. 29:13
Luke 19:10
- 6 Ezek. 34