

### LEARNING ON THE TRAIL

Psalm 119 is like the Appalachian Trail (A.T.) because of its great length and many ups and downs. It is divided into 22 sections of eight verses each, corresponding to the 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet. Since it is an acrostic, the eight verses in each stanza begin with the same Hebrew letter.

The interactive commentary in this study is from the [Biblical Hiking Course](#), a four-credit summer school course at fictional Quest Bible College. It is mostly taught on the trail by special guest speaker Dr. Dan Trek, an expert on Psalm 119, the Appalachian Trail, and Jeremiah.

#### Dr. Trek (on Mem stanza basics and the Double Top method)

Today, we are in the 13th stanza of Psalm 119, the Mem or M stanza (verses 97-104), which is a couple stanzas beyond the midpoint. The low point of the entire trail, if you remember, is 81-88, the K stanza in which the psalmist was persecuted to the point of despair. Today, however, we are on much higher ground, one of the great Psalm 119 peaks. I call it Meditation Mountain, because meditation is so important and mentioned directly in the first and third verses (97 and 99).

Today, we have two worksheets to discuss, since we are using the Double Top method of Bible study. We will be looking at the psalmist in a couple different ways. The first worksheet is about his struggles. — In the valley sections like the deep and dark K stanza, he mostly struggled with persecution, but in the peak stanzas like Mem he was more concerned about his own sinfulness, not slipping and falling into sin. — The second worksheet is about the psalmist's positive attitude and confidence in the Lord. That's where the meditation comes in. — Are there any questions?

#### Frank (on the importance of the first-in-verse terms)

Please show us the first word in each M verse. Frankly, without seeing the original first terms in each verse, I get lost. Otherwise, many things in Psalm 119 all look alike. These terms are like the white blazes on the A.T. I need to see them.

#### Dr. Trek (on the first-in-verse terms in the Mem stanza)

Indeed, the first-in-verse terms can be lifesavers. Here is the list for the Mem (M) stanza. There are really only two first-in-verse terms, both of which is used multiple times. One of them is translated two different ways, *more than* and *from*. — Mark these special M terms in your Bibles.

verse	Strong's #s	translation
97	4100 + 0157	oh, how I love
98	4480 + 0341	more than my enemies
99	4480 + 3605	more than my teachers
100	4480 + 2205	more than the ancients
101	4480 + 3605	from every
102	4480 + 4941	from your judgments
103	4100 + 4452	how sweet (are)
104	4480 + 6490	from your precepts

**Dr. Trek** (on enemies rarely being mentioned in Mem)

Everyone knows that the psalmist had enemies, but they are only directly mentioned once in the Mem stanza, in verse 98. Just two stanzas earlier, in 81-88, they were everywhere. What happened?

**Frank** (on quick scenic changes seeming strange)

Frankly, I don't know, but it sure seems strange, because you can't go from grassy hilltops in Virginia to cliffs above the treeline in the mountains of New Hampshire in only one or two days.

**Dr. Trek** (on the psalmist's mind flying from letter to letter)

Not unless you fly! Personally, I believe the psalmist's mind often flew from one Hebrew letter to another, and Hebrew K (kaph) terms tend to be dark while Hebrew L and M terms tend to be more encouraging. In addition, real-life situation sometimes change very quickly. (See Jer. 38:5-13.)

Mark the lines below as either correct (C), incorrect (X), or partly correct (▲).

**A** ( ) The psalmist had enemies.

- A-1 ( ) He had many enemies (98, 157).  
 A-2 ( ) He was wiser than his enemies (98).  
 A-3 ( ) No friends are mentioned in the M stanza (99, 63).  
 A-4 ( ) His enemies made life very difficult for him (95, 107, 115).  
 A-5 ( ) They were not focused on God's commands like he was (98).  
 A-6 ( ) He said that he hated his enemies (97, 103-104, 113, 128, 163).  
 A-7 ( ) He constantly thought about those who opposed him (92, 97, 111).  
 A-8 ( ) Like the psalmist, Jeremiah had many enemies (Jer. 1:18-19, 15:20-21).  
 A-9 ( ) The biggest enemy the psalmist faced in Mem was his own weakness.

**B** ( ) The psalmist had to struggle to avoid sin.

- B-1 ( ) He sounds boastful in verses 98-101.  
 B-2 ( ) He knew that he was not perfect (5, 101, 176).  
 B-3 ( ) He was not naturally wise (98-100, 104, 130, 169).  
 B-4 ( ) He decided to hate every evil (101) and false (104) way.  
 B-5 ( ) He needed to be taught by the Lord (12, 33, 99, 102, 108).  
 B-6 ( ) He constantly thought about the danger of falling into sin (97).  
 B-7 ( ) His enemies probably did not struggle against sin (85, 95, 98, 110).  
 B-8 ( ) Like all believers, he had to deal with temptation (5, 9, 101-102, 104).  
 B-9 ( ) The struggle against sin is mentioned more in the M stanza than enemies.

**Dr. Trek** (on the danger of being confident)

One of the great dangers in long-distance hiking is becoming overconfident. As endurance and knowledge improve with experience, some hikers become careless. Did that happen to the psalmist?

**Red** (on the psalmist not being boastful)

The first few times I read the stanza, verses 98-100 sounded boastful, but then I remembered that the psalmist was praying. Only a fool would try to boast before God like the Pharisee did in Luke 18:11. I don't think the psalmist was a fool (98) or a Pharisee. His confessions in verses 5 and 176 show that he took his natural sinfulness seriously.

Why then didn't the psalmist sound more contrite and humble in the Mem stanza? I think it is because he was rejoicing in the Lord who had done great things for him. The Lord had enabled his obedience (102). So the psalmist was not boasting about it, even though it may sound like he was.

Mark the lines below as either correct (C), incorrect (X), or partly correct (▲).

**D** ( ) The psalmist sounds cheerful and confident in the Mem stanza.

- D-1 ( ) He did not ask the Lord for anything in 97-104.
- D-2 ( ) He did not seem to be in danger in the Mem stanza.
- D-3 ( ) He had wisdom (98) and understanding (99, 100, 104).
- D-4 ( ) He was in more danger in 105-112 (N) than in 97-104 (M).
- D-5 ( ) There are two exclamation marks in the Mem stanza (97, 103).
- D-6 ( ) In verse 103, he sounds like someone enjoying a wonderful desert.
- D-7 ( ) He sounds much more cheerful in 97-104 (M) than earlier in 81-88 (K).
- D-8 ( ) There are more exclamations in the M stanza (97, 103) than in any other.
- D-9 ( ) He was not a simple person who did not know what to do (100-102, 130).

**E** ( ) The psalmist had joy because of God's teaching.

- E-1 ( ) God had taught him (99, 102).
- E-2 ( ) He knew Hebrew very well (1-176).
- E-3 ( ) He had received a great education (98-100).
- E-4 ( ) Godly joy doesn't lead to proud boasting (97-98).
- E-5 ( ) He was thankful, rather than boastful in 98-100.
- E-6 ( ) He loved and hated the right things (97, 103-104).
- E-7 ( ) He thought about God's teaching all day long (97).
- E-8 ( ) He probably did not do hard physical work all day (97).
- E-9 ( ) He practiced various kinds of spiritual meditation (97, 99).

Commentary from various perspectives as overheard in Biblical Hiking Class at imaginary Quest Bible College

**Dr. Trek** (on the psalmist being alone like Jeremiah)

It is a shame in a way that there are a dozen of us in this class, because the psalmist was persecuted and alone most of the time. There were no friends nearby (A-3) and he had many enemies (A-1). In such a setting, probably the biggest temptation that he faced (B-8) was the temptation to quit. Jeremiah was tempted and pressured to quit (Jer. 15:10).

**Red** (on Wiersbe's comments about the author)

Who do you believe wrote Psalm 119? I noticed that Warren Wiersbe thinks it was probably Jeremiah. [Be Exultant: Praising God for His Might Works, Victor, 2004, p. 102] Do you agree with him?

**Dr. Trek** (on the psalmist being Jeremiah)

Yes, for many reasons. For instance, verse 46 shows that the psalmist was a prophet rather than a king. It was mainly the ruling elite who opposed both the psalmist (23, 122, 161) and Jeremiah (Jer. 1:18, 26:21). The strongest evidence is the fact that both the psalmist and Jeremiah used acrostics.

**Socie** (on the psalmist sounding anti-social)

We can see the similarities with Jeremiah, especially in the psalmist's lack of friends (A-3, A-8), negative comments about other people (98-100), and strong statements against evil and false ways (101, 104). These things are all prophet like, of course, but they also seem anti-social. It's good, of course, that the psalmist loved the Lord's teaching (97), but I wonder if he really loved people.

**Dr. Trek** (on the psalmist not being anti-social)

Of course, he did! The psalmist's and Jeremiah's love for others is clearly seen in verses like Psa. 119:136, Jer. 9:1, and Lam. 2:11, all of which mention tears. He did not say that he hated his enemies (A-6), and he was not anti-social, though those who oppose evil (E-6) are often accused of being so (119:69, Jer. 37:13). Moreover, the psalmist considered all those who feared the Lord to be his companions (63, 79), but there were few godly people around. His opponents and most of the people did not hate evil and false ways like the psalmist did (139, B-7). — What do you think Indy?

**Indy** (on the importance of personal fellowship with God)

I love Psalm 119 and the Mem stanza because they show that the secret to true happiness is a personal relationship with the Lord through his word (E), not your number of friends on Facebook. Two of Socie's favorite words, 'we' and 'our,' are nowhere to be found in Psalm 119. [Cf. verse four.] Yet, there are two great exclamations on biblical joy in the Mem stanzas (97, 103, D-5).

**Dr. Trek** (on why the psalmist was wise and joyful)

Hiking alone can be a great blessing, if you think and pray biblically as you go. The admirable thing about the psalmist's thinking was his focus on the Lord and his word (97). He was aware of his enemies (98) and personal sinfulness (5, 35-37, 101), but he did not dwell on such (A-7, B-6).

The psalmist did not read theology textbooks all day, but he was theological in a practical way. His thoughts were centered on God (97). That was the secret to his wisdom (97-98, D-3) and joy (E, E-7). He loved being with the Lord on 'Meditation Mountain' (97-104). [Line E-8 is correct; line E-9 is not.]