

Dr. Ed (on the length and 22 sections of the Psalmist Trail)

I hope you all enjoyed reading through Psalm 119 during the semester break. As you know, I like to compare it to the Appalachian Trail since it is so long. Yet, the Psalmist Trail is wonderfully even and easy to read, since it had 22 short stanzas of only eight verses each. The 14 states on the A.T. are far from equal. The section in Virginia is especially long. — Anyway, how did your reading go?

Frank (on starting and finishing a long-distance hike)

Well, frankly, the break wasn't long enough. So I ended up reading the last couple stanzas after returning to school. Finishing it yesterday reminded me of the day I finished the A.T. on August 5, 2017. What a great day that was!

The day I started the trail, 77 days earlier in May, was not so great. Beginning is tough. You quickly discover how weak you are, and the psalmist seemed to do so as well. Look at all the negative things that he said about himself in verses five, six, and eight. Frankly, it sounds to me like he was afraid of not finishing. Many people don't.

Joyce (on hope leading to joy)

Don't be so negative, Frank! You never would have had the joy of finishing the A.T. if you hadn't begun with hope. Starting wasn't all pain, was it? The first two verses of Psalm 119 sound hopeful to me, and I love verse seven which shows the psalmist's thankfulness. He knew that he had much to learn (7b), but he didn't let that stop him. It helped him get started. This is a course on biblical survival, but I'm looking forward to all 22 studies, because we know that the psalmist survived to the end and finished well.

Cal (on the perseverance of the saints)

Yes, of course, he did. The Lord was with him all the way, just like he is with us. We can go astray, slip, and fall into sin (5-6, 67, 176) to some extent, but God is near (151), even if we have doubts (82, 84). The saints persevere, because the Savior is perfect. It depends on HIM! Like Joyce said, it helps a lot to know that there will be a happy ending.

The discussion below was overheard during study #1 in the course on Psalm 119 and Biblical Survival at Quest Bible College, a fictional school. — The four-step W.A.L.K. method is used. Watching for data (W.), Analyzing themes (A.), Linking the passage (L.), in order to Know what to do (K.)

Wes (on the many who do not finish)

Yea, but what about all the hikers who never finish? I've heard that less than half of the would-be thru-hikers who start in Georgia make it as far as West Virginia. There were good reasons for the psalmist to be doubtful (5, 8b) as well as hopeful (1-2, 7). Is it God's fault that many hikers lack the strength and endurance to go all the way to Maine? No, it depends on the individual. In *Pilgrim's Progress*, most of *Christian's* companions never made it to *the Celestial City*.

Evan (on the psalmist's initial commitment)

I believe you have to look at the decision that was made at the beginning. That's what count, and that's what I see in the first stanza. Like *Christian* in Bunyan's allegory, the psalmist was burdened by his sin as he looked at all the Lord's commands (5-6). Yet, he still committed himself to God and the journey (7-8). Sadly, he lacked assurance at first (8b), but that came with time as he got stronger in the faith along the way (28, 167-168).

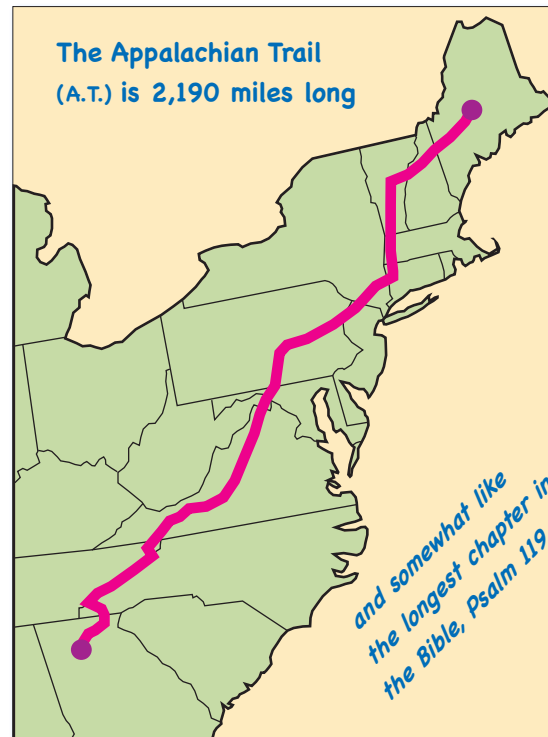
Red (on similarities between Psalm 119 and *Pilgrim's Progress*)

I read through *The Pilgrim's Progress* as well as Psalm 119 during the break because hope is important in both. *Hopeful* was the only character that made it all the way with *Christian*. In contrast to him, *Ignorance* had a false hope that he could make it to *the Celestial City* through good works. He didn't. That is clear, but . . .

Psalm 119 is perplexing because it often sounds like the psalmist wrongly hoped that he could survive through good works. So how can we reconcile the psalmist's stress on obedience (1-2, 4, 8) and the fact that we can not save ourselves?

Dr. Ed (on the big difference between Psalm 119 and *Pilgrim's Progress*)

The simple answer is that Psalm 119 is about the survival of a believer as a servant of the Lord. It's about perseverance in ministry. [Compare 8b and 43a.] Unlike Bunyan's main character, the psalmist was a believer from the first line. He prayed constantly and referred to himself as God's servant 14 times! Perhaps the psalmist's struggled with sin in Aleph (5-6, 8) is like Paul's struggle in Romans chapter seven. What do you think?



Psalm 119		Word-Use Summary Chart for the Aleph (A) Stanza						stanza #1	
1	<div>0835854918701980B + 84513068</div> <p>Blessed (are) - the upright - (in the) way, ---- who walk - in the law of - the Lord!</p> <p><i>Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD.</i></p> <div>◇◇</div>	Aleph A-1							
2	<div>0835353415713B + 36053820.1875</div> <p>Blessed (are) - - those keeping - His testimonies, ---- with the whole - heart - they seek Him!</p> <p><i>Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart.</i></p> <div>◇◇</div>	Aleph A-2							
3	<div>0637 380864665766B + 18701980</div> <p>Also - not - do they practice - evil; ---- in His way - they walk.</p> <p><i>They also do no iniquity : they walk in his ways..</i></p> <div>◇◇</div>	Aleph A-3							
4	<div>085966806490L + 81043966</div> <p>You - You have commanded - Your precepts - to be kept - very carefully.</p> <p><i>Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently.</i></p> <div>◇◇</div>	Aleph A-4							
5	<div>030535591870L + 81042706</div> <p>Oh that - were fixed - my ways - to keep - Your statutes!</p> <p><i>Oh that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!</i></p> <div>◇◇</div>	Aleph A-5							
6	<div>09540954B + 5027041336054687</div> <p>Then - not - I shall be ashamed ---- when I look - to - all - Your commands.</p> <p><i>Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments.</i></p> <div>◇◇</div>	Aleph A-6							
7	<div>3034B + 34763824B + 392549416664</div> <p>I will (gratefully) acknowledge You - with integrity - of heart, ---- in my learning - judgments / rules - Your righteous</p> <p><i>I will praise thee with uprightness of heart, when I shall have learned thy righteous judgments..</i></p> <div>◇◇</div>	Aleph A-7							
8	<div>0853 + 270681040408580057043966</div> <p>Your statutes - I will keep; - not - do forsake me - till - very much.</p> <p><i>I will keep — thy statutes: O forsake me not utterly.</i></p> <div>◇◇</div>	Aleph A-8							

Four-step W.A.L.K. worksheet for Aleph

W	Watching for the passage data
W-1	() Verses one and two show that biblical people are blessed by the Lord.
W-2	() Verse three shows that some people do not sin (5, 1 John 3:4-9).
W-3	() The blessings in verses one and two are unconditional.
W-4	() To walk uprightly (1a) means to live biblically (2a).
W-5	() The psalmist is not in the first four verses.
W-6	() God's authority is stressed in verse four.
W-7	() The psalmist was afraid that he would lose his salvation (8b).
W-8	() The psalmist was afraid that he would lose his ministry (8, 43, 46).
W-9	() <i>Oh that</i> (5) is the only Aleph first-in-verse term that is a rare word.
W-10	() In Psalm 119, <i>keep</i> (#5341 & #8104) is a key term and means to obey.
W-11	() The psalmist promised that he would keep ALL of the Lord's statutes (8a).
W-12	() The psalmist knew that he was a sinner (5-6, 8b, 11, 59, 67, 101, 165, 167, 176).
W-13	() The psalmist loved God's word (2, 8, 10, 16, 24, 70, 97, 113, 119, 159, 163, 165, 167).
W-14	() The pronoun <i>You</i> in verse four is emphatic; the pronoun <i>I</i> in verses 6-8 is not.
W-15	() The psalmist said much about himself in Aleph.
W-16	() The psalmist was unstable (5-6, 67, 167-68, 176).
W-17	() The psalmist was humble (5, 8) and thankful (7, 62).
W-18	() The psalmist did not consider himself one of the blessed.
W-19	() God is totally righteous (4, 137), but the psalmist was not (5-6, 8).

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

Psalm 119:1-8

stanza #1

A	Analyzing the passage themes
A-1	() The psalmist's inner struggle is stressed, not his outward situation.
A-2	() The psalmist's sinfulness is stressed, but he still had some hope (5-8).
A-3	() The stanza is one of the most negative (1-8, 9-16, 17-24, 33-40, 81-88).
A-4	() The stanza shows that obeying God's word is the way to true happiness.
A-5	() The Scriptures are stressed in Aleph, but the biblical details are missing.
A-6	() Although faith is not directly mentioned, the stanza is about living by faith.
L	Linking the passage
L-1	() Psalm 119:1-2 is much like Psalms 1:1, 32:1-2, and 112:1.
L-2	() Psalm 84:11-12 shows that it is believers who walk uprightly (119:1).
L-3	() Being blessed in 1-2 is roughly equivalent to having great peace in 165.
L-4	() Paul taught that we do no need to keep the law (Rom. 7:1-25, Gal. 3:1-29).
L-5	() The psalmist's state-of-mind in 119:5-8 was similar to Paul's in Rom. 7:24-25.
L-6	() Verse 2b sounds much like Deut. 4:29 and Jer. 29:13 which were for captives.
L-8	() The psalmist was like a committed (7-8) but weak (5, 11) long-distance (8) hiker.
K	Knowing what to do
K-1	() I should focus on the Scriptures more (1-2) and myself less (5).
K-2	() I should focus on God's Word rather than my circumstances (1-2, 19).
K-3	() I should seek to be a humble, biblical realist like the psalmist was (5-8).
K-4	() I should deal with my own sin (5, 8) before speaking about that of others (21).

Dr. Ed (on thought-provoking lines that are only partly correct)

One of the main reasons we have such great discussions is because we use thought-provoking worksheets. There are always many correct line (W-1, W-4, W-6, W-13, A-1, L-3, K-2, etc.) and a few incorrect one (W-2, W-3, W-7), of course, but the lively back and forth is usually about points that should best be marked *partly-correct* with a triangle. This time, I marked six lines that way, and there are several more that are questionable. Which lines interested you by being partly right and partly wrong?

Theo (on the psalmist's promised obedience)

What about W-11? Strictly speaking, the psalmist did not promise to keep **all** of the Lord's statutes in verse eight, since the word **all** does not appear in the verse. So the line could be marked with an X as incorrect. However, the psalmist came close to promising that he would keep all the Lord's statutes. So I think he was making a fine theological distinction, but I suppose some might say that he and line W-11 are just tricky.

Dr. Ed (on the psalmist's carefully-worded promise)

Personally, I too believe the psalmist deliberately omitted **all** from his promise in 8a, because he knew that it was impossible to perfectly obey God's word. Yet, he also wish to boldly declare his desire do so. I think this reveals the dual nature of God's servants. We should whole-heartedly commit ourselves to serve the Lord, yet we know that we will fail to do **all** that we should. Even Paul said that he delighted in the law inwardly but was unable to keep it outwardly without God's help (Rom. 7:21-25).

Pete (on Peter's carefully-worded love for Jesus)

Yes, and it wasn't just Paul! In John chapter 21, Peter sounds much the same. He truly loved the Lord, but he was unable to say that he loved Him perfectly. So two different Greek words are used in the passage. Though they are both translated *love* in English, there is a fine difference. Peter loved Jesus and said so. Yet, he did not do so using the stronger term. Was that double-talk? In a way, yes, but in another way, no.

Dr. Ed (a question about biblical realism)

Ok, strictly speaking line W-11 is wrong, but it may be partly correct. So what? In light of this, what do you think about line K-3, about needing to be a humble, biblical realist?



Frank (on the need to define 'biblical realist')

Well, frankly, at first I thought K-3 was a no-brainer. Of course, I should humbly admit my instability (W-16) and imperfections like the psalmist did in verse five. He knew that he was a sinner (W-12) and so do I, but then I noticed that line K-3 is not just about verse five. It includes verse eight. So I began to wonder what it means to be a biblical realists. It must mean more than just admitting that I'm a sinner. — What does it mean, Dr. Ed? You are the one who made the worksheet.

Dr. Ed (on the psalmist's attitude in verse five)

True, but I did not write verses five through eight. What did *the psalmist* do in these verses? Did he simply admit his sin in a matter-of-fact way? No, there was passion in his words and a wish that things were different, just like there was when the Jewish servant girl told Naaman's wife about Elisha. The same rare term (#305) is used in 2 Kgs. 5:3 (W-9). — Now, what else did the psalmist do in 119:5-9 (W-5)?

Dan (on the non-use of the Hebrew pronoun I)

You might say that the psalmist talked about himself a lot in Aleph, since he was introspective (5). However, as one who grew up speaking Hebrew in Israel, I noticed something surprising. The psalmist did not use the independent personal pronoun, *I*. Since this emphatic term begins with Aleph, he could have used it as the first-in-verse term in all eight verses, but he didn't. The pronoun *I* in verses six through eight is simply part of the Hebrew verb and is not emphatic (W-14). So line W-15 is only partly correct.



Jim (on the psalmist's biblical hope)

You don't need to know Hebrew to see what's really important. The psalmist was counting on God's word to change him. It clearly says that in verses seven and eleven. That's why a biblical realist does not give up when his sinfulness is revealed. There is still hope in God (A-2).

Dr. Ed (on the use of English and Hebrew)

Thanks, Dan, for adding your special insight from the original Hebrew, and thank you, Jim, for reminding us that God wants all of us to read our Bibles and think. As in medicine, we should appreciate specialists but try not to become dependent upon them. So is knowing Hebrew helpful? The answer is yes and no, another triangle.

Dr. Ed (on various lines that may be only partly correct)

There are several more lines that might be partly correct. What do you think of W-18, W-19, A-3, A-6, L-1, L-4, L-5, and K-1? Some are fairly easy, but all of them are interesting and a bit controversial. Please try to be practical in your comments.

Jim (on applications: reading and repenting)

I'm all for that. So how about the first application line, K-1? Of course, we need to focus on the Scriptures more and read the Bible that God gave us. As for thinking about ourselves less, that is tricky, but the psalmist showed us how to do it properly. First, we need to think about our own sins before we start speak about the sins of others (K-4). Second, we need to think about our behavior in order to repent of wrong doing, but not so much that we become mostly focused on ourselves in a negative way and forget God. Repentance? Yes! Long-term dejection? No!

Red (on thankfulness in Psalms 119:7 and Romans 7:25)

Did anyone read what Paul wrote immediately after describing himself so negatively in Romans 7:21-24? He thanked and praised God in the first line in Romans 7:25. This is somewhat like what the psalmist did in Psalm 119:7.

Romans 7:25

I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind
I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.

However, Paul could speak about God's deliverance from sin much more fully than the psalmist. The Messiah had come (Romans 7:25a). Yet, most of Paul's greater thankfulness is expressed in Romans chapter eight. Also the commentaries that I read say that Paul was mostly speaking about his struggles with sin and the law in Romans 7:7-25. So I finally decided that line L-5 is probably correct.

Dr. Ed (on victory over personal sin)

Yes, commentators have various things to say about Paul in Romans chapter seven, but for sure there are solid reasons for us to feel more secure today than the psalmist did (W-8). Therefore we can serve the Lord better. The psalmist struggled because it was an earlier age, but he was still confident that God's word would help him overcome personal sin (7, 11), and it did. Suffering helped as well (67), but that's a different topic.

Theo (on the keeping of the law)

Nobody seems to want to talk about the big theological line, L-4. Did Paul teach that we do not need to keep God's law? Paul's inner struggle to live a holy life in Romans chapter seven and the New Testament in general shows that believers should endeavor to live holy lives, which is equivalent to keeping God's moral law without the superficial details which are never mentioned in Psalm 119. In addition, Galatians chapter three shows that there is no need to keep the law because salvation is through faith in the work of Christ. So from one perspective line L-4 is sound doctrine, but from another it is heresy.

Dr. Ed (on salvation and happiness)

Thanks, Theo. We can't be saved by keeping the law, but Paul and the psalmist both show that happiness in life is closely related to how we live (A-4). Therefore Aleph is quite negative because of the psalmist's concern for the destructive nature of sin (A-1, A-3).

Red (on God's promise to captives)

I agree, but we're missing something important. Psalm 119 was not written for priestly theologians in Jerusalem. Just read it and see! The temple and sacrifices are never mentioned. Also from reading Psalm 119:2 and comparing it with Jeremiah 29:13 and Deuteronomy 4:29 (L-6),

Deut. 4:29

But if from thence thou shalt seek the LORD thy God, thou shalt
find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul.

I'm convinced that the Psalm was written for captives in Babylon. Verses like these on seeking (#1875) the Lord with the whole (#3605) heart (#3820) are rare otherwise.

Dan (on Jewish education and the Messiah)

Yes, and in captivity the Jews needed a way to teach their children to love God's word in Hebrew. As an acrostic, Psalm 119 was a great tool, and biblical education and memorizing are stressed (7, 9-11). Today, Israel is in the land, but there is still no temple. I believe this is God's way of encouraging us to read more and think about the Messiah.

Dr. Ed (on applications: being more thankful)

Yes, and remember that although the psalmist was a godly man he struggled because the Messiah had not yet come. We can be more positive now than he was (7-8, K-3).

Thru-Hiking Psalm 119 – the Psalmist Trail	with Jeremiah	Psalm 119:1-8	Stanza #1, Aleph
W.	A.	L.	K.
<i>Who, What, When, etc. (especially countable things)</i>	<i>Theme Analysis, putting it All together</i>	<i>Like: what is the passage like?</i>	<i>Knowing what to do: Key points for us</i>
<p>Who was present?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the psalmist – but only in verses 5–8 - the blessed (1–3) – the psalmist wished to join (5) <p>When?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - before the enemies are mentioned in 21–23 - when temple was missing (never mentioned in Psa 119) <p>What was repeated?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Blessed (#0835 in 1–2) - God's Word nearly everywhere, but is NOT IN 3 - way (#1870 in 1, 3, 5) - KEEP (#5341 in 2 & #8104 in 4, 5, 8) Keep is by far the most common verb in Psalm 119. - all / whole (#3605 in 2, 6) All is to be kept (4), but psalmist could not (5–6) - walk (#1980 in 1, 3) is parallel to keep in 1–2 - carefully / utterly (#3966 in 4 & 8) - not (#3808 in 3, 6 and #0408 in 8) <p>Other Interesting Terms?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - You (#0859 in 4a) adding the pronoun showed special emphasis It begins with Aleph and is first-in-verse in 4a. The special 1st person pronoun (I) could be used first-in-verse in Aleph, but it never was. - Oh that (#0305 in 5) a rare term indicating contrary to fact state It introduces the unusual conditional set of lines which is similar to a petition (5–6). <p>How did the stanza end?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - KEEP is used in 8a in a climactic promise. - The only true petition in Aleph is in 8b. (Cf. 5–6.) 	<p>What are the various themes?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - biblical living under God's authority keeping God's rules & walking biblically, which is the life that is blessed by God - the psalmist's sinful instability He wanted to live right (1–3), but he was unstable (5–6). He was not fully established (73a). - the psalmist's hope and ministry (5–8) The conditional sentence (5–6) shows hope. Ongoing ministry was goal of 8b prayer (Linking 8b and 43a shows this.) <p>What is Aleph (1–8) about as a whole?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - IT'S NOT ABOUT ETERNAL SALVATION. The psalmist was God's servant (17, etc.). His ministry needed to be preserved (8b). - IT'S ABOUT ATTITUDE. Seriousness (1–8) Humility (4–6, 8b) Hope (1–3, 7–8) Submission (7–8) - IT'S ABOUT BIBLICAL REALISM. God's word convicts (6) and gives hope (7). The psalmist was imperfect but hopeful. 	<p>Like what other Scripture?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Like walking in God's law in Jeremiah Jer. 9:13, 26:4, 32:23, 44:10,23 → 119:1 (This may imply Jeremiah wrote Psa. 119.) - Like the captives in Babylon Deut. 4:29 → Jer. 29:13 → 119:2b (This may imply Jeremiah wrote Psa. 119.) - Like being blessed without the temple in Psa. 1:1–2, 84:12, 112:1, 119:1–2 (This may imply the readers were in Babylon.) - Like if only of a Jewish servant girl 2 Kgs 5:3 (#305 used as in 119:5) (The term use indicates wishful speaking.) - Like N.T. biblical realism? 119:5 → Rom. 7:21–25, John 21:15–17 (The Spirit's coming changed this some. Romans 8) <p>Like what in general?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - God is like a GOOD (strict) PARENT. Blessing is the goal (1–2), but obedience is required (4), and the child is imperfect (5–6). - The psalmist was like the CHILD. He yearned to please (5–6). He learned and was thankful (7). Yet he was insecure in service (8b, 43a). <p>Like what on the Appalachian Trail?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - LIKE BEGINNING THE TRAIL <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - with both fear and hope, - feeling personally weak (5) - but still willing (8) 	<p>What are the key points in 119:1–8?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - CAUTION: IT IS NOT ABOUT SALVATION. It was about service. The psalmist was God's servant. (There are many indications he was Jeremiah.) - BE A BIBLICAL REALIST. BE LIKE THE PSALMIST. ** Believe in God's blessing (1–2). Take sin seriously (3–6). Don't hide personal weakness (5). Be a thankful, biblical learner (7). Commit to serve the Lord (8a). Pray about the service (8b). - START TO SERVE despite instability (5) and fear (8b). Begin your thru-hike (8), by trusting in God's word (7–11). - **BONUS: BE MORE HOPEFUL! The Messiah has now come. The Holy Spirit has now come. Our reality is a bit different today. We can feel more secure (Rom. 8:32), but sin still must be taken seriously.