

## the model student in Psalm 119

### *Psa. 119:97-104 (Hebrew M, Mem)*

**119:97** O how love I thy law! It is my meditation all the day.

**119:98** Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies: for they are ever with me.

**119:99** I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation.

**119:100** I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts.

**119:101** I have refrained my feet from every evil way, that I might keep thy word.

**119:102** I have not departed from thy judgments: for thou hast taught me.

**119:103** How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!

**119:104** Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way.

### Why is Psalm 119 so long?

Why is Psalm 119 the longest chapter in the Bible? From a purely mathematical perspective, it is because there are eight verses for each of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet and eight times 22 equals 176. More personally, it is probably because the Word of God was extremely important to the psalmist. (Notice, for instance, that there are eight different terms referring to the Scriptures: testimonies, precepts, law, statutes, commandments, judgments, ordinances, and word.)

Psalm 119 is also long because of the psalmist's interaction with or reference to various other characters. These other characters are *the proud* (21, 51, 69, 78, 85, 122), *the wicked* (53, 61, 95, 110, 119, 155), *enemies* (98, 139, 157), *those who fear the Lord* (63, 74, 79), *those who are blessed* or happy (1, 2), *princes* (23, 161), *a young man* (9), *kings* (46), *teachers* (99), *the ancients* (100), *evildoers* (115), and *persecutors* (157). In general there is far more about those who opposed the psalmist than about those whom he considered his companions (63).

Finally, Psalm 119 is long because the psalmist wrote about himself in great detail and in various ways. Primarily he viewed himself as one who served the Lord (17, 23, 38, 49, 65, 76, 84, 122, 124, 125, 135, 140, 176), but in the Mem stanza (97-104) he appears as a model or superior student.

## negatives

Psalms 119 may be the longest Psalm and chapter in the Bible, but it is not the best known. Psalm 23, for instance, is much better known and memorized by far more people. The same may be true of Psalms 1, 19, 37, and 139 as well. Moreover, Psalms 2, 22, and 110 are messianic, while Psalm 119 is not.

The biggest problem most people have with Psalm 119 are because of its great length, its repetition, and above all, their inability to see which word comes first in the original 176 verse Hebrew acrostic. The emphasis in each verse was therefore easier to see in the original Hebrew than it is in translation.

The authors of many Psalms, including Psalms 23, 34 and 51 which were written by David, are directly named. This makes it easier for readers to relate the contents of these Psalms to the situation to which the words refer. The author of Psalm 119 is unnamed however. (Line A-5 must be answered with care.)

If there is a model student in 119:97-104, it is the unnamed author himself. The “B” lines below are about whether the author should be called “a model student” or something else. Perhaps the most difficult line is B-4. Was the psalmist boasting about himself or about the Lord in verses 98-100?

*Mark the points below as correct (C), incorrect (X), or partly correct (▲).*

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| <b>A</b> | ( ) <b>Psalm 119 is difficult in various ways.</b>                         |
| A-1      | ( ) It is much too long to memorize easily.                                |
| A-2      | ( ) There is a lot of repetition, such as in 97b and 99b.                  |
| A-3      | ( ) It is rarely read or quoted by believers today (9, 11, 105).           |
| A-4      | ( ) It is impossible to fully appreciate without knowing Hebrew.           |
| A-5      | ( ) We have no idea who the author was (46, 49, 78-79, 136, 161).          |
| <b>B</b> | ( ) <b>The various terms associated with learning can be confusing.</b>    |
| B-1      | ( ) The psalmist loved to meditate rather than study (97, 99).             |
| B-2      | ( ) There is more stress in 98-100 on being wise than on study.            |
| B-3      | ( ) The psalmist did not directly say that he was a model student.         |
| B-4      | ( ) A model student would not boast like the psalmist did in 98-100.       |
| B-5      | ( ) He learned through affliction rather than study (67-68, 71-72, 75).    |
| B-6      | ( ) Jesus was the true model Student for us (Lk. 2:41-52, Heb. 5:8).       |
| B-7      | ( ) There is more stress on right living than on study habits in 101-104.  |
| B-8      | ( ) The psalmist was a servant (17, 23, 49, 125, 176), not just a student. |

## positives

There is much to learn from Psalm 119, especially about the role the Scriptures played in the life of the much persecuted author. Though we do not know the author's name, there are many things reported about him, some of which are strong hints concerning his identity (46, 49, 78-79, 136, 161).

Verse 46 shows that the author was probably not a king. Rather he was most likely a prophet who confronted multiple evil kings. Though he may have had a few godly companions (63, 74, 78-79) for the most part he was rejected and strongly opposed (51, 69, 95, 110, 115, 157, 161).

Some of the lines on the opposite page call for fine distinctions between study in general and meditation (B-1) and between being a servant and being a student of the Word (B-8). Lines D, D-6 and D-8 below, however, are broader, assuming that a truly good student will also be a good worker.

Though imperfect (5, 176) and subject to temptation (11, 36-37), the psalmist was growing in the Lord (32). Since he had a clear conscience (101-102, 167-168), the Word of God was sweet to him (97, 103). He may not have been brilliant, but he was a good servant and a good student of God's Word.

*Mark the points below as correct (C), incorrect (X), or partly correct (▲).*

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| <b>C</b> | ( ) <b>Psalm 119 is important in various ways.</b>                      |
| C-1      | ( ) It is about true happiness (1-2, 14, 97, 103, 162).                 |
| C-2      | ( ) It is about personal purity (5, 9-11, 33, 101-104, 168).            |
| C-3      | ( ) It is about fellowship with other believers (63, 79, 101, 115).     |
| C-4      | ( ) It is about how to overcome affliction (81-88, 92, 95, 107, 109).   |
| C-5      | ( ) It is about gaining biblical wisdom and understanding (27, 98-104). |
| <b>D</b> | ( ) <b>It is easy to see a model student in 119:97-104.</b>             |
| D-1      | ( ) The psalmist loved the Scriptures (97, 103).                        |
| D-2      | ( ) He had many teachers (99, 102, 108, 124, 171).                      |
| D-3      | ( ) He spent much time in the Word of God (97-99, 149).                 |
| D-4      | ( ) He was not distracted by worldly things (36-37, 97, 127).           |
| D-5      | ( ) He did well when tested and tempted (92-93, 98-104, 176).           |
| D-6      | ( ) He served the Lord and did good work (100-101, 121-126, 176).       |
| D-7      | ( ) He was a prayerful student (12, 73). (Psalm 119 is mostly prayer.)  |
| D-8      | ( ) Psalm 119 was written by a learner (7, 9-12, 66-68, 102, 124, 135). |

## conclusions

### worksheet answers

There are many lines which are only partly correct. These are A-1, A-3, A-4, B, B-1, B-2, B-4, B-5, C-3, D, D-4, and D-5. Of these, lines A-3, C-3, and D-2 could also be marked as incorrect. Psalm 119 is popular with some people (A-3). Fellowship with other believers is only rarely mentioned in Psalm 119 (C-3). And verse 99 does not say that the psalmist had many teachers (D-2). Mainly God taught him (33, 64, 102, 108, 124).

The three most controversial lines are probably A-4, A-5, and B-4. It is possible to greatly appreciate Psalm 119 without knowing Hebrew, but a lot of explanation (commentary) is required. So if full understanding is stressed, line A-4 may be correct.

Line A-5 is incorrect. We know from verse 46 that the psalmist was probably a prophet and not King David. Moreover there are various hints that Jeremiah was that prophet. This includes the similarities between Psalm 119 and Lamentations. (Both make great use of Hebrew alphabetical order.)

The psalmist seems to be boasting about himself in verses 98-100, but these are part of his long prayer (B-4). He was not speaking to other people. (Verse 115 is a rare example of that.) Moreover in verse 102, he said that it was the Lord who had taught him. His ability to understand was God given, though he himself decided to spend much time in the Word (97, D-3).

### So what?

Whether the psalmist should be called a model student or not is highly debatable. So line D can be marked various ways. Even so, the psalmist clearly had superior understanding through the Scriptures when compared to many others (98-100). Perhaps he should therefore be called a superior student instead of a model student. Yet these two labels are not very different. (So line D is at least partly correct.)

The Lord Jesus was the only perfect Model (B-6, D-5). Nevertheless, the rejection and suffering of the innocent psalmist (161) and that of Jeremiah show that the rejection of God's servants is to be expected. (This is Stephen's theme in Acts chapter seven as well.)

What should we do in light of Psalms 119:97-104? Obviously, we should be like the psalmist. Since meditation is mentioned twice in these few verses (97, 99), we should spend time meditating on God's word. This is more than just studying at a desk for hours, though that may be involved (B-1).

Serving the Lord in a studious way, requires love and hate. The psalmist loved God's word and hated every false way. He stressed this with an opening exclamation in verse 97 and in the two final verses of the stanza (103-104). Academic ability is never mentioned, but heart attitude certainly is. *Verse 32 may show that when the attitude is right, the ability increases.*

### applications

*Apply the points which you believe are most important or seem most needful.*

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