

John Ruskin was a layman who lived over 100 years ago. His mother taught him to memorize Scripture as a boy and one of the portions of Scripture that she helped him memorize was Psalm 119. He said he hated memorizing it as a boy, but he would later say that this Psalm became the most precious part of the Bible to him because it gives a glorious portrait of a love for the Word of God.

Perhaps the most dramatic account for the benefit of totally memorizing this Psalm was George Wishart, the Bishop of Edinburgh, in the 18th century. He found himself in a very difficult spot after being condemned to death. He was sure that he would be pardoned, but the pardon had not arrived yet. Finally, he was taken to the scaffold to be executed; but before anyone was executed they were permitted to recite or pray a Psalm. Wishart chose to recite Psalm 119, which he had memorized. Before he was finished reciting the Psalm, the pardon arrived and he was spared.

Psalm 119 is like no other passage or chapter in all of God's Word. It is a Psalm that has been used by God to strengthen, comfort and encourage people in many different times and in many different ways. It is obviously a Psalm that ministers to the one who wrote it.

It is a Psalm that speaks of joy found in the Word (119:14, 162). It is a Psalm that speaks of revival that comes through the Word (119:25, 37, 40, 50, 93, 107, 149, 154, 156, 159). It is a Psalm that speaks of comfort that comes through the Word (119:28, 50-52). It is a Psalm that speaks of purity that comes through the Word (119:9). It is a Psalm that speaks of righteousness that comes through the Word (119:105-106, 121, 137). It is a Psalm that speaks of a God-honoring hatred based on the Word (119:113, 163). It is a Psalm that speaks of justice that comes through the Word (119:121, 128). It is a Psalm that speaks of the truth that is in all the Word (119:160).

It is a Psalm the writer loved.

Jonathon Edwards, the powerful preacher and theologian of the 1700's, said of this Psalm: "I know of no part of the Holy Scriptures where the nature and evidence of true and sincere godliness are so fully and largely insisted on and delineated as in the One Hundred Nineteenth Psalm."

William Wilberforce, the famous British politician who was almost solely responsible for demolishing slavery in England, spoke of the comfort he gained when he would quote Psalm 119. He said that as he would walk through dangerous parts of the city that was filled with political turmoil and unrest, he would quote this Psalm. David Livingstone, the famous missionary to Africa, memorized Psalm 119.

Even though it is the 23rd Psalm that is probably the most familiar Psalm, we suggest that the 119th Psalm is the most unique Psalm. There is nothing in all of the Word of God that begins to compare with it. So in the next weeks we would like to take you through the Psalm.

Tonight we would like to introduce the Psalm by asking and answering a series of questions:

QUESTION #1 – What is so unique about Psalm 119?

There are many things that are very unique about this Psalm. We would like to point out four very unique features, which all begin with a word that starts with the letter “s”:

Unique Feature #1 - Psalm 119 is very unique in size.

This is an obvious observation to make. There are 176 verses in the Psalm. It is obviously the longest Psalm in the book of Psalms and it is also the longest chapter in the entire Bible.

By virtue of this fact, we may logically conclude that when God goes to all of the trouble to have one chapter stand taller than the others to the point that it stands out, it is clear that He wants to make a monumental statement about the importance of His Word. This chapter is the largest chapter in all of the Bible, which would indicate God is communicating a monumental point.

Unique Feature #2 - Psalm 119 is very unique in structure.

Psalm 119 is the most systematized and structured chapter in the entire Bible. The writer of this Psalm gave very careful attention to its written systematic order. This Psalm is an alphabetical acrostic that is brilliantly structured. There are 22 sections of eight verses each, and there are 22 times the name Jehovah occurs (v. 1, 12, 31, 33, 41, 52, 55, 57, 64, 65, 75, 89, 107, 108, 137, 145, 149, 151, 159, 166, 169, 174).

There are twenty two sections, stanzas or paragraphs to the Psalm and each section begins with a new letter of the Hebrew alphabet in precise order as the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Also each verse in the section begins with the same Hebrew letter for a total of eight verses in each section.

In the notes we have provided for you, the Hebrew letter is listed at the top of each section and the word that actually begins with that Hebrew letter is underlined in the English translation. Each of the underlined words actually begins the Hebrew text with the appropriate letter.

It is suspected that the reason for this is for memorization purposes. But whatever the reason, the truth is this is very unique in its structure.

Unique Feature #3 - Psalm 119 is unique in secrecy.

Most Psalms have a title and an author, but this Psalm has neither. Although we probably can guess who the author is, there is secrecy about it. **The reason for this is because of the writer’s theme.**

By virtue of the fact that the writer does not identify himself indicates that he wanted something to stand out high above any author or title.

Unique Feature #4 - Psalm 119 is unique in subject.

Psalm 119 is designed to do one thing and that is to exalt the Word of God.

Thomas Robinson, a Biblical scholar of the 1800's, said, "It is impossible to study the Bible too much or to esteem it too highly." Charles Spurgeon said, "The one theme is the word of the Lord." C. I. Scofield called this "the great Psalm on the word of God. It extols the beauties and excellences of the written word."

In fact, with the exception of verses 84 and 122, every verse in this Psalm has a direct reference to the Word of God. Harry Bultema observed, with the exception of these two verses, this Psalm mentions the Scripture in every verse (*Psalms*, p. 107).

It is no coincidence that the Hebrew alphabet is so masterfully used in this Psalm for this is a Psalm designed to emphasize the written Word of God and the Word of God was first written in the Hebrew language.

It will become evident upon reading the Psalm that the writer is crying out to God for a steadfastness and strength in the midst of a world of troubles, trials and hardships. The clear message that this Psalm communicates is that steadfastness, strength, courage, joy and power come from the Word of God. One key theme is we do not have strength, in and of ourselves, to keep the commandments of God (i.e. v. 5, 10, 17-18, 27, 29).

As one intensely reads, studies and meditates on the Word of God, one becomes pure, strong, reliable, stable, righteous and victorious. **This is truly an anthem of praise that exalts the Word of God.**

Martin Luther said this Psalm "is chiefly written to make us excited about God's word. Its primary concern is that we have God's word in its purity and hear it gladly. From this concern, then, come powerful prayers, instructions, thanks, prophecies, worship of God, and all that pleases God and grieves the Devil" (*Reading the Psalms*, pp. 284-285).

QUESTION #2 – Who wrote Psalm 119?

The text does not specifically say who wrote it, but from the text we may make six observations:

Observation #1 - The one who wrote it was probably a young man. **119:9, 99-100, 141**

Observation #2 - The one who wrote it had suffered scorn, ridicule and contempt.
119:22, 42, 51, 69, 78

Observation #3 - The one who wrote it had been in situations where his life had been in literal danger. **119:87, 95**

Observation #4 - The one who wrote it had experienced God's disciplinary affliction.
119:67, 71, 75, 107, 153

Observation #5 - The one who wrote it had been a successful warrior. **119:109**

Observation #6 - The one who wrote it had been criticized and hated by high-ranking people.
119:23, 161

When one considers all of these facts about the author, one comes to immediately realize why many Bible teachers do believe that Psalm 119 was written by David. David was the one who was called the “sweet psalmist of Israel” (II Sam. 23:1).

Charles Spurgeon said, “We believe David wrote this Psalm. It is Davidic in tone and expression...”.

The information in the Psalm certainly fits with the information about David. The fact that this Psalm stresses such a love for the Word of God is one that certainly lends itself to a “man after God’s own heart.”

QUESTION #3 – When was Psalm 119 written?

Just as we do not know the exact name of the author, we also do not know the exact date of writing. The one thing we may conclude is that this Psalm was written sometime after the Law of God had been written (119:1, 18). Obviously much of the Hebrew Old Testament had been written, especially the law of God with its commandments, statutes, testimonies, precepts and ordinances.

Certainly this general observation takes us well beyond the days of Moses. We know that David brought the Word of God to Jerusalem (II Sam. 6:12). We also know that David instructed Solomon to carefully follow the Word of God (I Kings 2:3).

From these facts, we know that much of the Word of God was in print at the time of David.

Assuming this Psalm is his, it was probably written about 1000 years before Christ.

QUESTION #4 – What are the key words of the 119th Psalm?

We know that every word is important in God’s Word and every word is inspired and it is pure. But there is no question that there are certain words that are key words of this Psalm because they are used over and over again to describe the importance of God’s Word.

Ten different words are used in this Psalm that specifically refers to the written Word of God. Hebrew poetry demands that repetition of things is designed to make a point.

Word #1 - The word "law" is used some 25 times.

Word #2 - The word "word" is used some 20 times.

Word #3 - The word "saying" is used some 19 times.

Word #4 - The word "commandment" is used some 21 times.

Word #5 - The word "statutes" is used some 21 times.

Word #6 - The word "judgment" is used some 19 times in its plural form and 4 times in its singular form.

Word #7 - The word "precepts" is used some 21 times.

Word #8 - The word "testimony" is used some 22 times in its plural form and 1 time in its singular form.

Word #9 - The word "way" is used 5 times in its plural form and 6 times in its singular form.

Word #10 - The word "path" is used 5 times.

Every one of these words is given for the purpose of placing a heavy emphasis on the Word of God. With the exception of verses 90, 122 and 132, one of these ten words shows up in every verse.

Dr. Charles Ryrie made an interesting observation when he wrote: "The psalm conveys the thought that the Word of God contains everything man needs to know. Except for verses 1-3, 115, it is addressed to the Lord" (*Ryrie Study Bible Expanded Edition*, NASV, p. 911).

Psalm 119 exalts God's Word. It is a masterpiece of praise to God for His precious Word. Every problem we face or have may be resolved by the Word of God. Every issue of life has a solution in God's Word. The more we know of the Word, the more stable and secure we will be. That is the essence of Psalm 119.