

THE LONG AND THE SHORT OF IT

PSALMS 117

Of the 1189 chapters in the Bible, Psalm 117 is the 595th or the middle chapter. It's also the shortest chapter, and maybe that was the reason my dad chose to read it to us whenever it was his turn to put my brother and I to bed.

Dad worked hard, and by Wednesday night he was tired. But mom was at choir practice so he'd tuck us in, open his Bible, and read at a hurried pace, "Praise the LORD, all ye nations! Praise Him, all ye peoples! For His merciful kindness is great toward us, and the truth of the LORD endureth forever. Praise the LORD!" *Goodnight boys!* I was an adult before I realized "*Goodnight boys*" wasn't part of the biblical text.

Hey, at least dad read us God's Word, and I'll always remember Psalm 117.

PSALMS 119

Years ago in England there was a custom allowing a criminal the opportunity to read a psalm just before his execution. When George Wishart came to the gallows he chose Psalm 119. He knew it was the longest psalm, and longest chapter in the Bible - 176 verses.

The story goes that two-thirds of the way

through the psalm a pardon arrived ordering Wishart's freedom. His knowledge of the Bible had literally saved his life. If he had chosen Psalm 117 he would've been dead meat.

George Wishart is not the only man who's been saved by Psalm 119. Many a person has been saved from sin by Psalm 119 - not by its length, but by its content. Psalm 119 is the Bible on the Bible. It's all about the Word of God.

At least 10 different synonyms are used of the Scriptures in this chapter - *law, way, precepts, testimony, word, commandments, judgments, sayings, statutes, and truth.*

Psalm 119 is also an acrostic. It's divided into 22 sections - 8 verses each - with each section beginning with a succeeding letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The form of the psalm made it easier for the Hebrews to put it to memory.

PSALMS 118:8

Of the Bible's 31,173 verses Psalm 118:8 is the middle verse.

Notice the message God plants at the heart of His Word, "It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man." Here's the Bible in a nutshell!

Devotion Box - Just Say So !

Psalm 107 begins, "Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever. Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, whom He has redeemed from the hand of the enemy..."

God's mercies are too expensive and expansive to be worked off, or repaid. The redeemed have only one obligation... *just say so!*

If God has rescued you from the slavery of sin, all He asks of you in return is to speak up - let His mercies be known. Go public with your praise! Tell somebody.

Devotion Box - How Can a Young Man Cleanse His Way?

Psalm 119:9 poses an intriguing question, "How can a young man cleanse his way?" Notice he doesn't ask, "*how can a child or a grandpa cleanse his way?*" I mean, little kids and grandpas are known as notorious sinners.

But young men! Adolescent males are hotheaded, cocky, passionate, reckless, hormonal, stubborn, impulsive, obstinate, independent, and on and on. If you can cleanse a young man's way you can effect anyone!

And what performs the cleansing? "By taking heed according to Your word."

Only God's Word has the ability to renew a mind, transform a character, create a new outlook, break old habits, produce sensitivity, spawn self-discipline, develop faith! There are a thousand shortcuts, but our only hope is a steady diet of God's Word!

Devotion Box - A Wave of Praise

Psalm 113:3 tells us, "From the rising of the sun to its going down the LORD'S name is to be praised." As the earth rotates into the light of the sun every city and country should greet the new day with praise and thanksgiving to God.

Think of it ... on a given day Jesus is praised in secret gatherings of Chinese Christians - in the thatched huts of India - in the cathedrals of Europe - by you and I in Atlanta, Georgia - by cowboys in Texas - and surfers in California - and Eskimos in Alaska.

As the sun travels across the sky it's followed by a worldwide wave of praise!

PSALMS 113-118: THE HALLEL PSALMS

The most dramatic night in history was April 10, 32 AD. That was the evening prior to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ... the event that changed the world forever. On that night Jesus and His disciples celebrated the Jewish Passover. Matthew 26:30 tells us that at the conclusion of the meal Jesus and company sang a hymn.

The songs sung at the Passover were Psalms 113-118, *the Hallel Psalms*. "Hallel" means "praise", but these psalms were not just *praise*, but also *prophecy*. Many of the lines Jesus sang that night were fulfilled by events the very next day.

Devotion Box - An Idol of the Ideal

Notice verses 2-3, "Why should the Gentiles say, "So where is their God?" But our God is in heaven; He does whatever He pleases." Hey, *God is God... He's not applying for the job!* Our God does *whatever, whenever, however, and forever*.

The psalmist compares God to the idols of the Gentiles. Verse 5, "They have mouths, but they do not speak..." They also have eyes that can't see. Ears that don't hear. Noses that don't smell. Hands that can't touch. Feet that won't walk. This is the *idiocy of idolatry*. How can the product of my work – work for me?

Here's the explanation for idolatry... verse 8, "Those who make them are like them; so is everyone who trusts in them." Every idol is a reflection of its creator. If we fashioned an idol it would be what we be if we were perfect. An idol is my ideal. It's an exalted version of its human maker. Idolatry is the epitome of self-worship.

Always be careful of thinking, "*If I were God I'd do this...*" That's idolatry. True worship begins with the realization: *I am not God. His ways are not my ways. His ways are higher.* Idolatry fashions a god in my own image, whereas faith is my willingness to be conformed into the image of the one, true God. Idolatry makes up its own rules, whereas real worship comes to God on His terms.

Devotion Box - How To Say Thanks To God

Psalm 116:12 asks the question, "What shall I render to the LORD for all His benefits toward me?" In other words, *how do you say thanks to God?*

The psalmist suggests three ways...

- 1) "Take up the cup of salvation." In other words, enjoy the blessings God provides. Don't let one drop of His joy and grace and peace go unsavored.
- 2) "Call upon the name of the LORD." Don't just dial 9-1-1, dial G-O-D. When God bails me out, I say thanks by running to him the next time I have a problem.
- 3) He says, "pay my vows to the LORD now in the presence of all His people." Go public with your praise! True gratitude is never ashamed to express itself.

PSALM 118: A MESSIANIC PSALM

Verse 22 is quoted often in the New Testament, "The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone", and draws on a Hebrew legend.

When the temple was constructed the first stone that came from the quarry didn't meet their specs – it looked odd. The workers pushed it over a cliff.

But as the building neared completion, the builders needed the cornerstone. They were shocked to realize this was the stone they had rejected.

This will be Jewish reaction when they realize they've rejected their Messiah. Their cornerstone has become the foundation of a new building, the Church.

Verses 25-26 were quoted by the crowd that welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem. "Save now" or literally "*Hosanna*"... 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!' was the cry on the Mount of Olives at His triumphant entry.

The Jews hoped Jesus would save them - not from sin, but from Roman rule, but His ambitions were spiritual, not political. The cornerstone didn't meet their specs, so the builders of Judaism rejected Him. That's why later that week Jesus stood again on the same Mount, and looked over the city of Jerusalem and wept.

Messiah had come, but was rejected. Jesus said, "you shall see Me no more till you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!'" When Jesus does come in power and glory, the same cry will welcome Him a second time.

PSALM 127: SOLOMON ON KIDS

"Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb is a reward." It's been said, "Children should be viewed as valuable additions, not needed deductions." Parents, treasure your kids. They're a gift, a blessing, a reward.

Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth. Kids are a *reward*, but they're also a *responsibility*. The bow and arrow was a break-thru in ancient warfare. You could now kill a man from a distance. Prior to the bow it was hand to hand, but with this new technology you could send an arrow on ahead.

This should be our goal with our kids. I want my kids to go farther, and higher, and straighter than I've traveled.

Often one of my children will cop out, and try to blame me, "Well, when you were a kid you..." I'm quick to squelch it – I'm upfront – if they don't turn out and do better than me, I'll be disappointed.

My responsibility is to aim 'em in the Lord's direction, then send 'em sailing further than I've been.

I like the quote by Louis Pasteur, "When I approach a child, he inspires in me two sentiments: tenderness for what he is, and respect for what he may become." I think that's the right balance. He's my reward, but he's also my responsibility.

PSALMS 120 - 134: THE SONGS OF ASCENT

To simplify matters, and avoid confusion among his people, God has always designated one place on earth where man could meet with God. Today, that one place is “in Christ Jesus”. In the Old Testament it was the temple in Jerusalem. Fifteen psalms – 120-134 – are called “*The Songs of Ascent*”, and were sung by the Hebrews as they journeyed to the temple for their annual feasts.

There’re two reasons why they’re called songs of *ascent*. First, Jerusalem sat in the mountains. To reach her from any direction required a climb. But second, the journey to Jerusalem was always an lift. You left behind the daily grind, and entered the presence of God. Worship is always an ascending experience.

Of course, we as Christians are also on a pilgrimage. We’re on our way to heaven, the New Jerusalem – and as we grow in Christ, we’re ascending. Getting to know God, becoming like Him, sharing Him with others is a move upwards!

The 15 “*Songs of Ascent*” are grouped in triads – 5 clusters of 3 psalms each.

The first psalm in each cluster expresses the *trouble*. The second in the cluster describes the pilgrim’s *trust* in God. And the third psalm records the pilgrim’s response to God’s *triumph*. *Trouble - Trust - Triumph*.

Devotion Box - God Never Sleeps

In Psalm 121 the psalmist is confident the Lord will preserve him.

Often the trek to Jerusalem included treacherous terrain. On our trips to Israel we go up from Jericho to Jerusalem along the pilgrim’s path. It’s a narrow road that hugs the mountains. The tires of the bus come within inches of slipping over the ledge into the ravine below.

The pilgrim knows the danger, but He trusts in God. Verses 3-4 record his confession, “He will not allow your foot to be moved; He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.”

God never dozes off at the wheel, or falls asleep on the job. He’s faithful to watch over us.

THE PICTURES OF PSALM 119

Each eight verse section of Psalm 119 begins with a succeeding letter of the Hebrew alphabet. It’s an acrostic. Since Hebrew letters have corresponding images associated with them, some commentators see the pictures as being descriptive of the different attributes of the Word of God...

“*Aleph*” - *ox*. The Bible carries our burdens.
“*Beth*” - *house*. It’s a refuge – a home away from home.
“*Gimel*” - *camel*. Drink from God’s Word, and you’ll never grow thirsty.
“*Daleth*” - *door*. The Bible opens the door to God’s riches and treasures.
“*He*” - *window*. It’s a window into the mysteries and secrets of God.
“*Waw*” - *peg*. The Bible nails down the truth. It’s certain.
“*Zayin*” - *weapon*. Ephesians 6 calls the Bible “the sword of the Spirit”.
“*Heth*” - *fence*. It places boundaries on behavior that keep us safe.
“*Teth*” - *serpent*. The Word strikes our hearts suddenly and quickly.
“*Yod*” - *hand*. The Bible was ultimately written by the hand of God.
“*Kaph*” - *wing*. It gives us wings to spiritually soar into God’s presence.
“*Lamed*” - *ox-goad*. It spurs us with conviction and motivation.
“*Mem*” - *water*. Ephesians 5 says we’re washed by the Word of God.
“*Nun*” - *fish*. Fishers of men will find the Bible to be the best bait.
“*Samek*” - *support*. The Bible props us up when we grow weak.
“*Ayin*” - *vision*. If you want a true vision of God, study His Word.
“*Pe*” - *mouth*. The Bible is God’s mouthpiece. It’s His Word to us.
“*Tsadde*” - *surrender*. You get to know God by yielding to His Word.
“*Qoph*” - *axhead*. At times the Word comes down hard. It’s a hammer.
“*Resh*” - *head*. God’s Word is our guide, our leader, our general.
“*Shin*” - *tooth*. You’ve got to bite into the Word to digest it. Dig in.
“*Tau*” - *mark*. Mark the Scriptures. Pay close attention to them.

Devotion Box - Unless the Lord Builds the House

Psalm 127 tells us, “Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it...” It seems many church leaders today have forgotten this principle. They trust in the latest method, scheme, or gimmick – rather than trusting the Lord to build His church!

If we’re going to do anything of eternal value God has to be in it. We have a part – but it’s one-tenth of one percent, compared to the part God plays.

That’s why we’re told in verse 2, “It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows; for so He gives His beloved sleep...” If we’re trusting God to do the work why are we stressing out - burning the candle at both ends?

Chill out. Leave it until tomorrow. Get a good night’s sleep. Hey, even sleep late from time to time. If God has everything under control, then live like He does!

Devotion Box - Focus on the Family

A pilgrimage to Jerusalem was a family affair, and the author of Psalm 128 is also focusing on the family. He says of his wife in verse 3, “Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine.” Guys, a vine does 3 things: *it clings, it climbs, and it clusters*.

Here’s what makes a good wife: *Cling to your husband* – give him your attention and affection – your time and tenderness - *and he’ll love you*. But also *climb spiritually* – don’t just live for your husband - grow in the Lord, and *your husband will respect you*. And lastly, *bear clusters* – *be a blessing to others, and your husband will admire you*, and be proud of you. *Cling, climb, and cluster*.

In verse 3 the psalmist mentions kids, “Your children like olive plants...” An olive tree is not the prettiest looking tree. It’s trunk is gnarled and twisted. And it takes years of careful cultivation before it ever bears fruit. But if you’re patient, and careful, an olive tree can become extremely productive.

Finally, the man of the house is mentioned in verse 4, “Behold, thus shall the man be blessed who fears the LORD.” Dad, your job is to fear the Lord. Humble yourself. Walk in His ways. Seek His wisdom. If you fear the Lord, your wife and children will have no fear in following your leadership.

If you have questions on tonight's study email Pastor Sandy - sandyadams@calvarychapel.org

Calvary Chapel Announcements - September 17, 2000 - 9/24 CCSM's 20th Birthday Celebration: A full day of fun, fellowship, and reflections (for a schedule, see the new issue of "LikeMinds") - 10/6-7 Marriage Retreat, "Enhancing Intimacy" at the Hilton Atlanta Northeast - For back issues of Bible Scan study guides:

www.calvarychapel.org/stonemountain/biblescan.htm Next Bible Scan - October 1 - Proverbs 1-31

"Let everything that has breath praise the LORD." - Psalm 150:6

Memory Verse

PSALM 139

The Omni's of God

Psalm 139 is one of the most beautiful ballads of all time - not just in the Bible - but in all literature. It was written by David, and speaks of God's *omniscience*, His *omnipresence*, His *omnipotence*. He's *all-knowing*, *always-present*, *all-powerful*.

The psalm begins, "O LORD, You have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off." In other words, God reads him like a book. Nothing is hidden from God.

Verse 7, "Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?" Ascend as high as heaven - descend as low as hell - in either case God is there! The psalmist says there is no escaping the presence of God.

It reminds me of the pastor who tried to help reform the little boy who had a reputation for thievery. First, he wanted to test his Bible knowledge. The pastor asked the boy, "Johnny, where is God?" Johnny shrugged. The pastor

asked again, "Johnny, where is God?" Johnny remained silent. The pastor, irritated that the boy wouldn't even talk, shouted, "JOHNNY, WHERE IS GOD?"

Johnny jumps up, runs home, races to his room, and locks himself in the closet. Of course, his mother wanted to know what was wrong? He answered, "The people up at the church have lost God, and they think I stole Him." Guys, God is not lost, or stolen. God is everywhere at all times. God is omnipresent.

The Sanctity of Human Life

Verses 13-15 shine a light on what God thinks about abortion. "For You formed my inward parts; you covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made... My frame was not hidden from You, when I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth." The phrase, "*lowest parts of the earth*" is another way of denoting the sacredness and mystery of a mother's womb.

Notice though, long before the psalmist was born the Lord oversaw his formation and development. As far as God was concerned the psalmist was a viable human at the moment of conception. In fact, verse 16 implies that even before conception God had a plan for his life - how he'd spend his days.

At 2 weeks a baby has a discernible heartbeat. At 43 days detectable brain waves. At 6.5 weeks the baby moves. At 9 weeks the baby has a unique set of fingerprints, its sex is apparent, and its kidneys are formed and functioning. At 12 weeks all the body organs are in operation, and the baby can even cry.

All this development takes place in a mother's first trimester. I'm convinced, biblically and medically, that abortion as birth control is nothing but murder.

The Love of God

The psalmist is discussing God's concern over us when he says in verse 17, "How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they would be more in number than the sand..."

Every time I go to the beach I pick up a handful of sand, let it pour slowly through my fingers, and I recall this verse. God's thoughts toward me are more than the grains of sand along the beach. Wow, He must really love me!

PSALMS 146-150: THE HALLELUJAH PSALMS

The long stream of psalms meanders along like a mighty river. For miles and miles it's navigated by the believer who wants to know God through a diverse landscape - through joys and sorrows, love and hate, faith and fear, loyalty and betrayal, pleasure and pain, glory and grief, satisfaction and frustration.

But as this river of psalms reaches its end it suddenly narrows. The river, wide and deep, gets funneled into narrow passages, and plunges down steep ledges. The river picks up power. Intensity grows. The waters boil. All the emotion and passion expressed in the psalms suddenly turns to praise in the last 5 psalms. Call it an avalanche of praise - a waterfall of exaltation and thanksgiving.

All life's journeys eventually culminate in the praise of God. Praise is the purpose for which we were created. Each of these last 5 chapters begin and end with the word "Hallelujah" or "Praise the Lord". Call 'em "*The Hallelujah Psalms*".