

48 My hands also I will lift up to Your commandments,
Which I love, And I will meditate on Your statutes.



Zayin

49 *Remember* the word to Your servant,
Upon which You have caused me to hope.

50 This is my comfort in my affliction,
For Your word has given me life.

51 The proud have me in great derision,
Yet I do not turn aside from Your law.

52 I remembered Your judgments of old, O LORD,
And have comforted myself.

53 Indignation has taken hold of me
Because of the wicked, who forsake Your law.

54 *Your statutes have been my songs
In the house of my pilgrimage.*

55 I remember Your name in the night, O LORD,
And I keep Your law.

56 This has become mine,
Because I kept Your precepts.



Heth

57 You are my portion, O LORD;
I have said that I would keep Your words.

Psalm 119:49-56 passage notes

We should take special notice of the way this section begins: “Remember.” Besides the fact that the word begins the section, there are two things that really make it stand out here. The first is that this is the only request that the psalmist makes of God in these eight verses. (Compare this to the *He* section, verses 33-40, where there are nine requests.) The second is that the word is repeated twice more, in a slightly different form, in subsequent verses. This is more than coincidence; the Hebrew of these words begins with the letter *Zayin*, and they are each the first word of the verses in which they appear.

“Remember what you promised, God.” That prayer has been prayed throughout the Bible and throughout the centuries. It pleases God when we cling to his word, and he delights in fulfilling it.

In the second half of verse 50, “Your word has given me life” could be translated “Your word revives me,” as it uses the same word as in verses 25 (*Revive me according to Your word*), 37 (*Revive me in Your way*), 40 (*Revive me in Your righteousness*), and others.

The passage features an interesting alternation of mood from verse to verse, bouncing back and forth from comfort to persecution, from peace to great emotion.

- 50 peace in affliction
- 51 great derision from the proud
- 52 comfort from God’s judgments
- 53 indignation
- 65 songs along life’s journey

The psalmist seems almost literally in the grip of emotions at times: The proud *have* me in great derision; indignation has *seized* me. “Indignation” is apparently something of a weak translation of the Hebrew word. The ESV translates it as “Hot indignation”; the KJV as “horror”; among commentators, Alexander Maclaren prefers “fiery anger,” while J. A. Alexander says “No English word is strong enough except rage or fury.”

This isn’t the only place in the psalm, of course, where the psalmist reacts to the actions of the ungodly with great emotion:

- Rivers of water run down from my eyes,
Because men do not keep Your law. (136)
- My zeal has consumed me,
Because my enemies have forgotten Your words. (139)

As the emotions in the *Zayin* section are typical of the psalm, so is the psalmist's steadfast faithfulness. How does he respond to the derision of the proud? By ignoring them, and turning to God's word. This response to persecution is seen throughout the psalm:

Princes also sit and speak against me,
But Your servant meditates on Your statutes. (23)
The cords of the wicked have bound me,
But I have not forgotten Your law. (61)
The proud have forged a lie against me,
But I will keep Your precepts with my whole heart. (69)
The wicked wait for me to destroy me,
But I will consider Your testimonies. (95)
The wicked have laid a snare for me,
Yet I have not strayed from Your precepts. (110)

May my response to personal attack always be as calm and as steadfast! As William S. Plumer remarked on verse 51, "It does not hurt the Christian to have the dogs bark at him." And may I ever refuse to yield principles to ridicule! "To be laughed out of one's faith is even worse than to be terrified out of it," notes Maclaren, comparing verses 23 and 51. "The lesson is not needless in a day when adherence and obedience to the Word are smiled at in so many quarters as indicating inferior intelligence." (Aren't you glad that things have gotten so much easier for Christians since Maclaren's time?)

Dr. A. Cohen takes the "judgments" of verse 52 as past judgments of God against the wicked. The psalmist comforts himself, he says, "In the lesson taught by past experience that the *proud* are ultimately humbled." But while the ultimate punishment of the wicked by God is surely part of our comfort, the word "judgments" can also be taken as God's dealings with the faithful. We can always trust him in the present because we know what he has done for us in the past. "Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen, and called its name Ebenezer, saying, 'Thus far the Lord has helped us.'" (1 Sam. 7:12)

Verse 54 is one of the high points of the psalm, portraying in a few words the psalm's deepest themes of pilgrimage (vs 19) and delight in God's word: "This world is not my home; sometimes I feel like a stranger because I am one. But God's laws have become for me in the place more than duty, more than comfort--they are my joy, my delight, my song."

I've had this literal blessing myself, as I've written melodies for the words of Ps. 119 in Spanish. My wife, Jodi, who has heard me work on the songs and heard them again in church, sometimes complains (with good humor, I hope), "I wake up in the middle of the night with those songs running through my head!" Yeah, that happens to me to. And sometimes, waking up in the night or lying in bed waiting to go to sleep, I review the verses until I go to sleep. And if I reach verse 55 or verse 148, I think, "Hey, I'm doing it!"

Verse 55. -- In the night. There is never a time in which it is not proper to turn to God and think on his name. In the darkness of midnight, in the darkness of mental depression, in the darkness of outward providence, God is still a fitting theme.

--William S. Plumer

"This has become mine, Because I kept Your precepts," says the psalmist in verse 56. Your reflections on this verse, more than on most, will depend on the version of the Bible you're using. The NIV's "This has been my practice: I obey your precepts" removes ambiguity, but removes with it much depth and beauty. If you need a word to clarify "This", better is the ESV's "This blessing has fallen to me, that I have kept your precepts." Keeping God's word is its own blessing; it is, in fact, a special gift, that which "has fallen to me."

This version has the advantage of mirroring the language of inheritance: "The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot. The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance," says Ps. 16:5-6 (ESV). (The "lines" here refer to the boundary lines, such as those of the territories of the tribes of Israel in the promised land.)

. . .[W]hatever advantages others may have had which I have not enjoyed, this supreme privilege has been mine, the keeping of Thy precepts. If this is the meaning, it strikes the keynote of the next stanza.

--A. F. Kirkpatrick

The link between the end of this section and the beginning of the next is definitely a strong one: "This has become mine" (or "This blessing has fallen to me"); "You are my portion, O Lord." My portion; my share; my inheritance; my heritage. (Compare vs 111: "Your testimonies I have taken as a heritage forever, for they are the rejoicing of my heart.")

Fortunately for me, the version I prefer is the one I have memorized: “This has become mine, Because I kept Your precepts.” To what does “this” refer? To something the reader will find in the previous verse or verses--but it’s up to him to find it. It could still be the practice of keeping God’s precepts; but it could also be hope, comfort in affliction, renewed life, statutes that become songs, or the remembrance of God in the night.

Or it could be all of that and more. Perhaps the believer’s inheritance is all of life, even the unpleasant things. Alexander Maclaren says:

Vs. 56 looks back on the mingled life of good and evil, of which some of the sorrows have just been touched, and speaks deep contentment with its portion. Whatever else is withheld or withdrawn, that lot is blessed which has been helped by God to keep His precepts, and they are happy and wise who deliberately prefer that good to all beside.

Notes on memorization:

It seems natural to divide this section into three parts, reflecting the threefold repetition of a form of the word “Remember.”

The page looked so nice already that I couldn’t bear to mark the recurrence of “comfort” (“comforted,” actually, the second time), but you may want to circle it.

I also have not marked the repetition of the word law in verses 51, 53, and 55. That’s unusual enough that it should be noted. (Again, compare vs. 33-40, where each of the terms for God’s word occurs in succession.) This was one of the most distinguishing characteristics of this section for me as I was memorizing; I always thought of it as the “law” passage.

I’ve highlighted vs. 54 to reflect its prominent role in the section and in the whole psalm--or perhaps just because it’s one of my favorites.

The second picture may seem a little odd, but I hope it works as a link between verses 56 and 57. This has become mine: this is my inheritance, my treasure, my nest egg, my portion. Okay, the picture may not work for you, but there’s an interesting thing about memory--if you don’t like the picture, you may end up remembering the passage even better.