

12th January 2023**How Love I thy Law****Psalms 119:97***Psalms 119:97**O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day.*

Psalms 119 is an interesting Psalm in that it has been arranged as an acrostic. That is it has been arranged to follow the Hebrew Alphabet. It has been designed in this way to be committed to memory. It has been composed so that the first eight verses of the psalm begin with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet - Aleph (א '); the next eight verses with the second letter - Beth (ב b); and so on, through the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. These parts are headed in many versions of the Bible by the names of the Hebrew letters respectively for example - Aleph, Beth, Gimel, Daleth, etc.

Each section has been divided into 8 sub sections, or sentences, conveniently arranged in verses. Although the Old Testament was not arranged in chapters and verses until 1440, these sentences in this Psalm are likely to have been original. Arranged in 8s, the Psalm is 176 verses long, and very nearly every verse contains one of a variety of words relating to the Will of God such as 'law', 'promise', 'word', 'statutes', 'commandments', 'ordinances', 'decrees', and 'precepts'. It seems the purpose of the Divinely inspired writer of this Psalm was to demonstrate how much could be said on the law of God being the rule of life, and that so many varied angles and shades of thought, without any repetition.

It seems then that this verse we are considering has captured this concept very nicely. *O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day.* British politician William Wilberforce would recite the entire Psalm while walking back from Parliament, through Hyde Park, to his home. He had committed it to memory – showing it is of course

possible. He was only 21 when he was elected to Parliament, and for decades tirelessly fought for the abolition of the slave trade. He belonged to a very strict sect of Methodists. He did not of course understand the scriptures fully, and stumbled at some basic doctrines, showing of course, that simply committing the words of the Bible to memory is vanity, unless it is understood.

That the Psalm can be committed to memory then, is not contested, but the verse we are looking at is emphasising meditation. The Hebrew word here is *siychah*. Which means contemplation, reflection, devotion. It is not the modern idea of meditation where you sit cross-legged, arms akimbo with thumbs and forefingers tightly pinched intoning umm, for hours on end, achieving not a lot. Instead, it is using the brain to think, purposefully, not randomly, because left to itself, the brain wanders aimlessly free, all over place. Purposefully, and deliberately to reflect – reflect what has been read, or what has been committed to memory, with the aim of understanding what has been read. It is to think to make connections. Each verse in the Psalm 119 gives an example of how connections are made, and can then be developed in the mind.

For example: This very verse... Meditation, Hebrew word *siychah*.. invokes to us modern Bible students the name Sychar – the name of the place that Jesus met the woman of Samaria in John 4:5. Yes, it was the root word from where the word Shechem comes from. Which became known as Samaria. (Whether the Hebrew words actually are the same is beside the point for this exercise, it is just how spiritual meditation works, to allow the Bible students brain to walk purposefully in its study.) It just seems noteworthy, that at this place Jesus was the connection between the written law – the account of where Jacob gave land to his son, and of the well that he dug, and the word of God in practice - *when the true worshippers*

shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him (John 4:23)

Looking at this verse though – *how love I thy law...* it begs the question – **Do I?** If so, how exactly? The law of God is not just the Torah section of the Bible, it is more than that, it is His purpose and will, His thoughts, and communication made to man, through His Divinely inspired writers. It is very difficult indeed to commit all that to memory, although not entirely impossible. But if we say we love the law of God, surely, one would reasonably expect such a claim to be backed up by a regular reading and study.

It is my meditation all the day – **Is it?** Was it? If we assume that King David was the author, which is very likely, then one might ask, well how can he meditate “all the day”, like he said, when he was: Head of State; King of the nation; Military Strategist; Writer and Poet; musician; husband to many wives; father to even more children; as well as musician, champion slingshot and shepherd in his spare time? When could he find time to meditate and think with so many demands? The truth is that he lived a life of meditation. He designed his life on the law – true he made mistakes – but that as the weakness of being a human. He ruled using the principles outlined in the statutes of God. He negotiated with wisdom he accumulated from the Word. He judged fairly using the examples given in the law. He fought courageously because he trusted in God’s precepts. His marriages were with kindred minds, (though lust was his downfall and spoils this analogy and meditation) he involved his family and included them. Even his aim was true because of his faith, and Goliath fell. – So did he meditate all the day . Yes he did. His meditation was often putting the law into practice! When he wasn’t doing this – it was then that his mind wandered and lust was conceived.

So can we meditate all the day? Yes. Like the author of this verse, we must design our life on the statutes, precepts, ordinances and decrees outlined throughout scripture, and live it. That way we are truly meditating - reflecting – being a reflection, the express image of Jesus Christ who was the law made flesh, full of grace and truth.

To be focussed in such a way is not possible without interaction with that law, that Word. Deuteronomy 6:6-9: *And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in your heart: And you shall teach them diligently unto your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when thou rise up. And you shalt bind them for a sign upon your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. And you shalt write them upon the posts of your house, and on your gates.* Daily meditation involves a life which is completely intertwined with scripture. To achieve this, means revolving our life around it, not just a quarterly ecclesial plan, but a personal weekly and daily plan even where we include time to read, think and action the Word of God. Only then can we truly say *O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day.*

Brother Terry