

the overcomer in Psalm 119

Psa. 119:153-160 (Hebrew R, Resh)

119:153 Consider mine affliction, and deliver me: for I do not forget thy law.
 119:154 Plead my cause, and deliver me: quicken me according to thy word.
 119:155 Salvation is far from the wicked: for they seek not thy statutes.
 119:156 Great are thy tender mercies, O LORD: quicken me according to thy judgments.
 119:157 Many are my persecutors and mine enemies; yet do I not decline from thy testimonies.
 119:158 I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved; because they kept not thy word.
 119:159 Consider how I love thy precepts: quicken me, O LORD, according to thy lovingkindness.
 119:160 Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever.

Psa. 119:161-168 (Hebrew final S, Shin)

119:161 Princes have persecuted me without a cause: but my heart standeth in awe of thy word.
 119:162 I rejoice at thy word, as one that findeth great spoil.
 119:163 I hate and abhor lying: but thy law do I love.
 119:164 Seven times a day do I praise thee because of thy righteous judgments.
 119:165 Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them.
 119:166 LORD, I have hoped for thy salvation, and done thy commandments.
 119:167 My soul hath kept thy testimonies; and I love them exceedingly.
 119:168 I have kept thy precepts and thy testimonies: for all my ways are before thee.

Psa. 119:169-176 (Hebrew final T, Tau)

119:169 Let my cry come near before thee, O LORD: give me understanding according to thy word.
 119:170 Let my supplication come before thee: deliver me according to thy word.
 119:171 My lips shall utter praise, when thou hast taught me thy statutes.
 119:172 My tongue shall speak of thy word: for all thy commandments are righteousness.
 119:173 Let thine hand help me; for I have chosen thy precepts.
 119:174 I have longed for thy salvation, O LORD; and thy law is my delight.
 119:175 Let my soul live, and it shall praise thee; and let thy judgments help me.
 119:176 I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments.

an unnamed overcomer

As he approached the end of his great acrostic* Psalm, the author of Psalm 119 seemed to have great peace (165) despite having been smeared and persecuted by the proud collection of princes who ruled over Judah at the time (23, 69, 161). He had been unjustly opposed by many (157). Yet he was confident that the Lord would answer his petitions (169-176). Thus, the unnamed psalmist was a great overcomer.

* Psalm 119 has 176 verses, eight verses for each of the 22 Hebrew letters. (8 X 22 = 176)

negatives

The psalmist had much to overcome in two areas. Externally he was persecuted by the wicked (95, 110), and internally he had to struggle with his own weakness and sinfulness (5, 176). The external struggle is mentioned more in some stanzas than in others. Occasionally, the internal struggle is prominent.

In the final stanza (169-176) for instance, the psalmist's enemies are never directly mentioned. Even so, the need for salvation and deliverance from them is still clearly seen in verses 174 and 175. In the final verse of the Psalm (176), the psalmist points to his own tendency to go astray.

External problems often become internal emotional struggles. For instance, the psalmist was angry because the wicked openly forsook God's word. (Verses 53 and 158 both speak of this.) Thankfully, the psalmist did not continually dwell on the problem. (See verses 54 and 159.)

The emotional low point for the psalmist was at the midpoint of the Psalm, in the Kaph (K) stanza (81-88), in which persecution is mentioned either directly or indirectly in every verse. He bounced back quickly in the Lamed (L) stanza (89-96), however, as he re-focused on God's eternal word.

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

A	() The psalmist was greatly persecuted.
A-1	() He had more foes than companions (63, 79, 156-158, 161).
A-2	() The persecution is mentioned often in 153-160 and 161-168.
A-3	() His various enemies are mentioned often and in every stanza.
A-4	() In the end, he defeated his foes (98, 119, 153-154, 174-176).
B	() The psalmist's enemies were very bad people.
B-1	() They were dishonest (69, 78, 118) and treacherous (85, 110, 150).
B-2	() They were powerful (23, 141, 161) and proud (21, 51, 69, 122).
B-3	() Many of his enemies were probably Gentiles (115, 161).
B-4	() They did not obey God's Word (53, 136, 150, 155, 158).
C	() The psalmist himself was imperfect.
C-1	() He felt weak (5, 32) and prone to go astray (11, 29, 176).
C-2	() He needed to be corrected and disciplined (67, 71, 75, 176).
C-3	() He sometimes complained to God (84, 126). (Cf. Jer. 15:18.)
C-4	() He thought about his enemies too much (51-54, 161-165, 174).

positives

The psalmist often went from an emotional low and an emphasis upon persecution in one stanza to a joyful high and biblical focus in the next eight verses. The Kaph (81-88) to Lamed (89-96) transition is one example, but this is seen in the transition from Resh (153-160) to Shin (161-168) as well.

The psalmist also often turned from negative thoughts about his enemies in the first line of a verse to a positive focus on the word of the Lord in the second line. For instance, in verse 161 he began with those who persecuted him but ended with awe for God's word. (Also see verses 95, 157, and 163.)

How was the psalmist able to repeatedly bounce back despite all the persecution that he faced? The simplest answer is that God himself made it possible. The Lord protected him (170), taught him (171), comforted him (50), strengthened him (32), gave him hope (147), and answered his prayers (176).

Humanly speaking, the psalmist overcame through his devotional life. He meditated on God's Word and spent much time in prayer. Moreover, his devotional life was so helpful because he had a clear conscience before God. *Lines D, E, and F below are correct. Not all the subpoints are fully correct however.*

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

D	() The psalmist had a clear conscience.
D-1	() He was persecuted without cause (109, 161).
D-2	() He had great peace (165) and great riches (162).
D-3	() He loved and obeyed God's Word (163, 166-168, 176).
D-4	() He was open about himself before God (5, 162, 168, 170, 176).
E	() The psalmist overcame through God's Word.
E-1	() God's Word helped him avoid sin (9-11, 101, 104, 161, 176).
E-2	() He spend much time in God's Word (55, 97-99, 147-148, 164).
E-3	() He encouraged himself by worshipping in the temple (108, 164).
E-4	() He trusted in God's promise to him (49, 81, 116). (Cf. Jer. 1:17-19.)
F	() The psalmist overcame through biblical prayer.
F-1	() His prayers were not just petitions (1-8, 89-96, 161-168, 171).
F-2	() He took his troubles to God (22, 154, 161, 170). (Cf. 1 Pet. 5:7.)
F-3	() He prayed for the national rulers (23, 46, 161). (Cf. 1 Tim. 2:1-2.)
F-4	() He was thankful (62, 71, 75, 99, 164) and hopeful (170-172, 175).

conclusions

worksheet answers

The majority of the lines are correct, but there are nine (A-2, A-3, A-4, B-3, C-4, D-2, E-3, and F-3) that are either incorrect or at best only partly true.

Though the psalmist's enemies are mentioned often in Psalm 119, there are various stanzas in which they are only mentioned a few times, if at all (A-3). One of these is the Shin stanza (161-168). So line A-2 is only partly correct.

The psalmist was confident that the Lord would fully remove the wicked from the earth someday (119). Yet, he also knew that God himself would have to do it, since he was unable to defeat his foes (A-4). In fact, verse 115 may show that the psalmist was not even able to get evildoers to leave him alone temporarily.

Some may argue that the psalmist's enemies were Gentiles because the author used the general term "God" instead of "the Lord" to address them in verse 115. More likely, this probably shows that he thought of the evildoers in the verse as unbelieving Jews. (Line B-3 is incorrect.)

If the psalmist had written about his enemies line after line and verse after verse, it would have shown that he thought about them too much. He almost never wrote this way. So line C-4 is incorrect. He turned his thoughts to the Lord. Verses 150-151 are a good example of this.

Line F-3 is incorrect or only partly correct because the psalmist prayed *about* the national rulers rather than *for* them.

So what?

The psalmist had few companions and many enemies (A-1). Moreover there is nothing to indicate that temple or tabernacle worship was important in his life (E-3).

The psalmist primarily received comfort from God himself through his Word (E) rather than through other people or through group worship. (Line E-3 is incorrect.) Perhaps the temple had been destroyed before Psalm 119 was written.

Though the psalmist's life was often in danger (109) because of the wicked drawing near (150), he spoke about the protective nearness of the Lord (151). Perhaps this involved a specific promise from God that he would not be killed by his enemies. Several verses (49-50, 81, 116) seem to indicate that this was the case (E-4).

Jeremiah received such a promise from the Lord (Jer. 1:17-19), and the more we learn about the unnamed psalmist the more similarities appear to the much-persecuted prophet. (*Verse 46 shows that the psalmist was not a king like David, but rather a prophet who spoke before kings.*)

The psalmist (Jeremiah?) obviously had a great public ministry for otherwise he would not have faced such great opposition (157, 161). Nevertheless, he rarely wrote anything specific about his work (46). Instead, he overcame his many enemies by focusing on the Lord himself.

Those who speak and think more about their work than they do about the Lord and his Word are not truly serving God.

applications

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