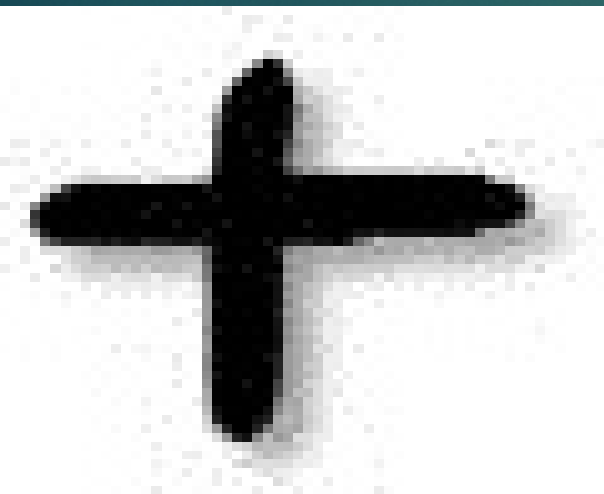
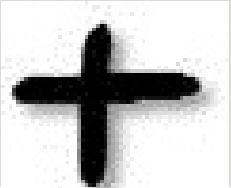
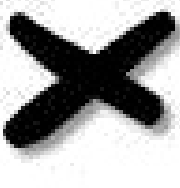






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TAU
(Psalm 119:169-176)



Letter Name	Early Hebrew	Middle Hebrew	Late Hebrew	Modern Hebrew
TAU				

Pictograph:

Meanings:

Sound:

Crossed Sticks

Mark, Sign, Signal,
Monument

T



TAU

Psalm 119:169–176

Petition for Insight and Help

169 Let my cry come before You, O LORD; Give me understanding according to Your word.

170 Let my supplication come before You; Deliver me according to Your word.

171 My lips shall utter praise, For You teach me Your statutes.

172 My tongue shall speak of Your word, For all Your commandments *are* righteousness.

173 Let Your hand become my help, For I have chosen Your precepts.

174 I long for Your salvation, O LORD, And Your law *is* my delight.

175 Let my soul live, and it shall praise You; And let Your judgments help me.

176 I have gone astray like a lost sheep; Seek Your servant, For I do not forget Your commandments.

Confessing that he has gone astray like a lost sheep, the psalmist calls for God to deliver him according to His Word so that he may praise and sing to God.

- I. Humble believers pray for deliverance and understanding (Psa 119:169–170)
- II. They desire to praise God for His Word which He has taught them (Psa 119:171–172)
- III. They pray for saving help and spiritual renewal because they love and seek to obey God's Word (173–175)
- IV. They pray for God to seek and find them because they have gone astray (176)

With this final file the lengthy meditation of Psalm 119 comes to its proper conclusion; but the desire for understanding God's Word and deliverance from adversaries have not yet been realized.

There are ten petitions in these lines demonstrating the psalmist's utter dependence upon God. In a spirit of humility, the antithesis of pride, he readily admits helplessness apart from God.

I. Humble believers pray for deliverance and understanding (Psa 119:169–170)

In the first two verses of the stanza, he prays for understanding and deliverance. In verse 169 he asks that his cry might come before the LORD; and then he specifies the intended result with “and give me understanding” that will be based on and in harmony with the Word.

¹⁶⁹ Let my cry come before You, O LORD; Give me understanding according to Your word.

Cry. רִנָּה (*rinnah*) ringing cry of joy or sorrow.

The verb *cry* is one of proclamation—a ringing shout! This is intensive prayer.

The cry for God to hear presupposes that God is under no obligation to hear us. When He does so, it is due to His grace, not our merit. We rejoice that His Word tells us He delights to respond to His own.

come before You, O Lord — *Let my cry approach your face, O Lord, literally.*

Come קָרַב (qarab) come near, approach.

before You, — to your face, literally. Our expression “face to face” conveys the idea.

The psalmist is very intense here. He knows that he does not deserve to be heard by God. So, he is asking God to allow his words to come into God's presence.

We also do not deserve anything from God. But we can pray with boldness, with confidence, because we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens and is sitting at the right hand of the Father.

Heb 4:16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Give me understanding according to Your word.

— cause me to understand —

בִּינָן (bin) understand, perceive, discern

The word *understanding* indicates being able to understand the situation so as to choose wisely. The psalmist is asking for the ability to distinguish between right and wrong, better and best, temporal and eternal.

The content of the cry is a prayer for the ability to distinguish.

In I Kings 3:9 king Solomon prays “Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?”

Understanding does not come automatically. The attainment of it requires a persistence. It is more than IQ, for it connotes character. One is at fault if he doesn't have it and, in fact, not to pursue it will incur God's discipline.

However, when one seeks understanding, it must be based on the Word. Therefore, he says, "according to your Word." This is in contrast to worldly wisdom.

Psalm 119:170 Let my supplication come before You; Deliver me according to Your word.

Supplication תְּחִינָה (techinnah) is derived from the Old Testament word for *grace*. The word occurs twenty-four times and means a prayer for grace.

Half of all the occurrences appear in Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple (I Kgs 8–9; II Chr 6). The success of the nation was dependent upon God's grace.

In this verse his desire is that his supplication come before the Lord, so that the Lord would deliver him.

The combination of “supplication” (an appeal for grace) and “before your face” (signifying grace) stresses the need for God’s grace for deliverance.

This appeal to be delivered, along with the need to gain understanding, are two frequent petitions made in Psalm 119.

Here the provision of deliverance from outward circumstances would give him freedom to learn and apply God's Word.

Many people pray for deliverance, but with no thought of being able to focus more time and energy on doing the Word. See 119:17, 117

deliver נָצַל (natsal) deliver, rescue, save.

The word means to pull someone or something apart, or to get someone out of a difficult situation.

For example, in 2 Sam 14:6, two boys were fighting and there was no one to “pull them apart.”

In Gen 32:12, Jacob prays, “deliver me from the hand of my brother.”

The psalmist prays for a temporal solution to a physical problem.

According to Your Word refers to expectations that harmonize with the teaching of the Word of God. The content of all valid prayer is the result of biblically defined expectations.

How often we want our problems to be solved according to our own desires rather than according to the Word.

II. The faithful desire to praise God for His Word which He has taught them (Psa 119:171–172)

The desire of the psalmist in the next two verses is to praise God.

But the basis for the praise will come from the Word of God.

Psalm 119:171 My lips shall utter praise, For You teach me Your statutes.

utter נָבַע (*naba* ') ***pour, gush forth***

The verb *utter* is colorful. It is used of the bubbling up of a spring of water. So, we could translate this as “bubble up” or “gush forth.”

praise תְּהִלָּה (*tehillah*) *praise*.

This word connotes being deeply thankful for someone or something and to be pleased to praise the superior qualities or the great acts of the object.

The word *praise* is the word used for the title of Psalms in the Hebrew Bible.

Learning the Word of God will result in an overflow of praise to God.

For You teach me Your statutes

Much of this teaching would come through Bible teachers, for example, the priests, who were expected to teach the law to Israel (Mal. 2:7).

But in the Psalter another way was through meditation on the Word (Ps. 119:97–99).

Just the thought of the Lord teaching him the eternal Word creates in him the desire to praise.

Psalm 119:172 My tongue shall speak of Your word, For all Your commandments *are* righteousness.

Speak עָנָה ('anah) to answer, respond, testify, speak, shout.

His response will be to tell others about the Word of God.

He wants to testify of the LORD upon his deliverance—spontaneously and enthusiastically. The focus of his praise will be twofold: God enables him to know the Word, and the Word is righteous.

When the believer truly understands that God's commandments are righteousness, he will talk to others about the Lord and give enthusiastic praise to God. Failure to do this indicates a lack of true understanding concerning the nature of God and His Word.

The appeal uses “my lips” in verse 171 and “my tongue” in verse 172, both figurative of his capacity to speak.

With the first he uses a verb of excitement: “pour forth” like a gushing spring of water; and with the second he uses “testify”, as a response to spiritual insight.

III. The faithful pray for saving help and spiritual renewal because they love and seek to obey God's Word (173–175)

Psalm 119:173 Let Your hand become my help,
For I have chosen Your precepts.

Your hand

The “hand of God” signifies God’s power; and that power will be needed to “help” the psalmist, i.e., do for him what he cannot do for himself.

And Moses said to the people: “Remember this day in which you went out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage; for by strength of hand the Lord brought you out of this *place*.” Exo 13:3

help עֵזֶר ('ezer) **help**.

This word is found more than 100 times in the Old Testament. Outside of Psalms it often means *military assistance*. It may be compounded with God's name in *Eliezer*, or with the word *stone*, as in *Ebenezer*, or stands alone in the name *Ezra*.

This is also the word which is used for Eve when God fashioned her as a *help* for Adam.

Personal assistance, non-military in character, is found particularly in Psalms.

God's hand (Ps 119:173) and his laws (Ps 119:175) are sources of help to the psalmist.

It is the righteous who can anticipate God's aid:

Psa 37:40 And the LORD shall help them and deliver them; He shall deliver them from the wicked, And save them, Because they trust in Him.

God is regarded as the only source of true help
(Psalm 107:12–13)

Now the psalmist urges God to deliver him.

The basis for this appeal is that the psalmist has chosen God's precepts—he wanted to know and observe them.

Psa 119:173 Let Your hand become my help, For I have chosen Your precepts.

בַּחַר (bachar) *to choose, elect, decide for.*

You must make a decision. The conduct of your spiritual life is a matter of your volition. You want God's help, but have you chosen God's precepts?

Psalm 119:174 I long for Your salvation, O LORD, And Your law *is* my delight.

I long for תַּאֲבֹב (ta'eb) (Ps 119:40, 174). To desire, want, long for.

He longs for God's deliverance, adding, "and your law is my delight" (cf., Ps. 1:3).

The reason the law is his delight is that, in part, it promises salvation to the believer. His prayer to be delivered will be answered, one way or another.

Psalm 119:175 Let my soul live, and it shall praise You; And let Your judgments help me.

The psalmist longs to live: “Let me live and praise you; and let your decisions help me.”

The verb “let me (‘my soul or life’) live.” He is not asking for spiritual revival here; he simply wants to live. But the motivation for this prayer is not simply the prolonging of his life, but for a specific purpose: to praise God.

In these final lines of Psalm 119, the source of help is God's hand (Psa 119:173) and God's Word (Psa 119:175).

God's judgments (decisions) help us in the struggles of life. The psalmist asks for deliverance again, but with the desire that his life be one that praises God.

There are three petitions in these verses—for help, for deliverance, and for life and there are four reasons stated for the prayers to be answered:

- 1) he has chosen God's law and is resolved to obey it;
- 2) he has longed for deliverance from all hindrances so that he might obey freely;
- 3) the law is his devotion and delight; and
- 4) he desires to praise God for the answers to his prayer.

He is a believer who trusts the LORD for salvation, is committed to obeying His Word, and will praise Him throughout his life.

Scripture teaches that God will bless such believers because this is what He desires from them.

Let my soul live

The Hebrew word for *life* is translated “live” in 119:17, 77, 116, 144, and “revive” in 119:37, 40, 50, 88, 107, 149, 154, 156, 159.

At times, the prayer for life may be physical. In Psalm 119:104, the psalmist speaks of being *exceedingly afflicted*, followed by a request that the Lord revive him.

The psalmist pictures himself on the verge of death in places; and thus, a request for physical delivery is in order.

Physical delivery, however, is not the major idea in his prayer for life. Without exception, there is no living at all unless God grants it. His only hope of living comes from God and His Word.

Dependence upon God for life is present in every one of the thirteen references to it in this psalm.

Life is viewed as dependent upon

God's bounty (119:17),

God's "never-failing graces" (119:88, 149, 159),

God's compassion (119:77), and

God's gift of understanding (119:144).

In several cases, life is seen as imparted by God's Word (119:50, 107, 154, 156). Blessing is seen as coming from God and God's Word, with no distinction made between the two. True life is God-infused life and is therefore a subject for prayer and petition.

**IV. They pray for God to seek and find them
because they have gone astray (176)**

Psalm 119:176 I have gone astray like a lost sheep; Seek Your servant, For I do not forget Your commandments.

I have gone astray like a lost sheep

In Psa 119:176, we have a personal confession: “I have gone astray like a lost sheep.”

We should not interpret this as we would the parable of the lost sheep in the New Testament, or as in Isaiah 53:6, for here the psalmist has repeatedly said that he is faithful to the Lord.

I have gone astray like a lost sheep תַּעֲהֶה (ta'ah)
err, wander, go astray.

This is likely describing some outward situations that have forced him to wander and not merely his spiritual condition. As he travels through life he is exposed to dangers, and those dangers often force him off course.

He has repeatedly declared his love of God's Word and stated that he has kept God's precepts. Therefore, when he says that he has gone astray like a lost sheep he is not saying that he is one who forgets God's commandments.

Rather, he is describing his helpless condition, exposed to enemies, in the midst of whom he wanders, without protection, not knowing where to find rest and shelter.

Of course, when he says, “I have gone astray,” there would obviously be the sense of sin as well as of weakness, but there is also the consciousness of love to God’s law, “I do not forget Your commandments.”

like a lost sheep.

Lost אָבַד (*'abad*) ***perish, be destroyed, die.***

The word translated “lost” has the sense of “perishing” or “ready to perish. This clarifies his appeal to God to let him live.

Seek Your servant, For I do not forget Your commandments.

Even though he has wandered and has come close to perishing, he remains God's faithful servant. Therefore, he petitions God to seek and find him. And God should do this because he is an obedient believer, one who does not forget the commandments.

This seems the best way to interpret these words, for the whole context of Psalm 119 has been one of love for the Word and obedience to the Lord, not that of a wandering sheep in the sense of rebellion and disobedience.

Seek Your servant.

Seek your servant is a plea for God to find him and bring him to a place of peace and security, to deliver him. His justification for this petition is that he does not forget (or ignore) your commandments.

For I do not forget Your commandments

forget שָׁכַח (shakach) ***forget, ignore***

THE PETITION-RATIONALE PATTERN

Rarely, if ever, does the psalmist make a petition without attaching some sort of rationale to it.

Petitions are backed with argumentation. “Here is *what* I ask, and this is *why* my petition should be granted.” Here are some major petition-reason examples.

The Petition-Expectation Argument (Psalm 119:170)

Psa 119:170 Let my supplication come before You;
Deliver me according to Your word.

“I ask only those things which Your Word has taught
me to expect.”

The Petition-Opportunity Argument (Psalm 119:171)

Psa 119:171 My lips shall utter praise, For You teach me Your statutes.

“Do this for me so I will have the opportunity to witness to your faithfulness.”

The Petition-Merit Argument (Psalm 119:172)

Psa 119:172 My tongue shall speak of Your word,
For all Your commandments are righteousness.

“Do this so the great merit of Your person and Your
Word will be exalted.”

The Petition-Choice Argument (Psalm 119:173).

Psa 119:173 Let Your hand become my help, For I have chosen Your precept

“Do this because I have chosen the right priorities.”

See also Psalm 119:10, 22, 66, and 153 for other examples.

The Petition-Praise Argument (Psalm 119:175)

Psa 119:175 Let my soul live, and it shall praise You; And let Your judgments help me.

“Do this so I will be able to praise You,” or “Do this and I promise to praise you when You answer my prayer.”

The Petition-Obedience Argument (Psalm 119:176)

Psa 119:176 I have gone astray like a lost sheep;
Seek Your servant, For I do not forget Your
commandments.

“Do this because I have been faithful to the conditions
which You have set forth in Your Word.”

The Petition-Vindication Argument (Psalm 119:126)

Psa 119:126 It is time for You to act, O LORD, For they have regarded Your law as void.

Do this so Your own character and Your Word will be vindicated.

Message and Application

The people of God are a praying people; they pray continually for the LORD to hear and answer their prayers. But as they meditate in His Word, they also come to see more areas of their lives that are not right, for the Word of the Lord convicts them of their sin.

Their prayers therefore necessarily include an appeal for forgiveness.

But the focus of the life must always be on glorifying God through obedience to His Word and praise to Him for His loyal love and His wonderful works to the children of men.