

Psalms 119:120

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

My flesh trembleth for fear of thee; and I am afraid of thy judgments.

Analysis

My flesh trembleth for fear of thee (סָמַר מִפְּחַדְךָ בְּשָׁרִי, samar mipachdkha vesari)—the verb samar means to bristle, stand on end, shudder. It describes hair standing up in horror. This is not reverential awe but terrified trembling before God's holiness. Basar (flesh) emphasizes the physical, involuntary response. Isaiah experienced this: **Woe is me! for I am undone** (Isa 6:5). Peter cried: **Depart from me; for I am a sinful man** (Luke 5:8).

And I am afraid of thy judgments (וּמִמִּשְׁפָּטֶיךָ יִרְאַתִּי, umimishpatekha yareti)—the verb yare means to fear, reverence, be afraid. God's mishpatim (judgments, ordinances) produce holy dread. This concludes the Samekh section with profound fear balancing the earlier love (v. 113, 119). Mature faith holds both: **Love the LORD** and **fear the LORD** (Deut 10:12). The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Prov 9:10). Without this trembling, love becomes presumption.

Historical Context

Israel encountered God's terrifying holiness at Sinai—thunder, lightning, earthquake, fire (Exod 19:16-18). The people trembled and feared they would die (Exod 20:18-19). This holy fear guarded against presuming on God's grace and maintained reverence for His law.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. When was the last time you experienced physical trembling or holy dread in God's presence?
2. How do you balance loving God's testimonies (v. 119) with fearing His judgments (v. 120)?
3. What aspects of God's character or judgments should produce more reverential fear in your life?

Interlinear Text

סֶמֶר	מִפְחָדְךָ	בְּשָׁרִי	וּמִמִּשְׁפָּטֶיךָ	יִרְאַתִּי:
trembleth	for fear	My flesh	of thy judgments	of thee and I am afraid
H5568	H6343	H1320	H4941	H3372

Additional Cross-References

Habakkuk 3:16 (Parallel theme): When I heard, my belly trembled; my lips quivered at the voice: rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself, that I might rest in the day of trouble: when he cometh up unto the people, he will invade them with his troops.

Hebrews 12:21 (Parallel theme): And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake:)

Isaiah 66:2 (Parallel theme): For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the LORD: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.

Philippians 2:12 (Parallel theme): Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

2 Chronicles 34:21 (Judgment): Go, enquire of the LORD for me, and for them that are left in Israel and in Judah, concerning the words of the book that is found: for great is the wrath of the LORD that is poured out upon us, because our fathers have not kept the word of the LORD, to do after all that is written in this book.

Psalms 119:53 (Parallel theme): Horror hath taken hold upon me because of the wicked that forsake thy law.

2 Chronicles 34:27 (Parallel theme): Because thine heart was tender, and thou didst humble thyself before God, when thou heardest his words against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, and humbledst thyself before me, and didst rend thy clothes, and weep before me; I have even heard thee also, saith the LORD.

1 Samuel 6:20 (Parallel theme): And the men of Beth-shemesh said, Who is able to stand before this holy LORD God? and to whom shall he go up from us?