

Psalm 119:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word.

Analysis

This verse asks the crucial question: "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?" The Hebrew *bameh* (how/by what means) seeks the method for moral purity. *Naar* (young man) emphasizes the vulnerability of youth to sin and folly. "Cleanse his way" uses *zakah orcho*—to purify, make clear, keep pure one's path. The answer: "by taking heed thereto according to thy word." *Lishmor* (taking heed) means to guard, observe, give attention—active vigilance. God's Word functions as both standard (revealing what is clean) and means (empowering cleansing). This anticipates Ephesians 5:26 (Christ cleanses the church "with the washing of water by the word"). Scripture sanctifies by revealing sin, pointing to Christ, and guiding righteous living.

Historical Context

In ancient Israel, young men faced particular temptations and responsibilities—military service, marriage preparation, establishing households. Without God's Word as guide, they easily fell into the cultural patterns of surrounding nations. The Wisdom literature (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes) specifically addresses young men, warning against sexual immorality, laziness, and bad company. This verse echoes Proverbs 4:20-27, which calls young men to guard their hearts and keep their paths straight.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. What specific temptations do young people face today that require guarding through God's Word?
2. How does Scripture function both as diagnostic (revealing impurity) and therapeutic (cleansing)?
3. In what practical ways can believers "take heed" to God's Word in daily life?

Interlinear Text

ה בְּתַה	יִצְחָה	בְּעֵר	אֶת	אֶרְחָה וְ
H4100	cleanse	BETH Wherewithal shall a young man	H853	his way

ל שָׁמָר קְדָבֶר בְּ
by taking heed thereto according to thy word
H8104 H1697

Additional Cross-References

2 Timothy 2:22 (Parallel theme): Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

Joshua 1:7 (Word): Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest.

Psalms 119:11 (Word): Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.

Psalms 25:7 (Parallel theme): Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions: according to thy mercy remember thou me for thy goodness' sake, O LORD.

Psalms 34:11 (Parallel theme): Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the LORD.

Proverbs 1:10 (Parallel theme): My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not.

John 15:3 (Word): Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.

Proverbs 4:1 (Parallel theme): Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding.

Proverbs 1:4 (Parallel theme): To give subtilty to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion.

Job 13:26 (Parallel theme): For thou writest bitter things against me, and makest me to possess the iniquities of my youth.