

DAY TWENTY

“A SOBER REMINDER”

PSALM 119:153-160

Sometimes, even with the best efforts of man, different things occur that keep you from following your plans (cf. James 4:15), even when you arise before the dawn. *The key is to be flexible.* Without being able to handle change, the vagaries of life might drive you mad. Without letting a few ministry opportunities get in the way, the return to the Omer Count continues because **He is most faithful** to revive us with the return to His Word, and with spiritual nourishment that can truly feed us! But before discussing some critical points, please take the time to read the following selections to prepare your heart to be reminded that salvation is indeed far from the wicked:

PSALM 67:1-7

For the choir director; with stringed instruments. A Psalm. A Song. God be gracious to us and bless us, *and* cause His face to shine upon us—Selah. That Your way may be known on the earth, Your salvation among all nations. Let the peoples praise You, O God; let all the peoples praise You. Let the nations be glad and sing for joy; for You will judge the peoples with uprightness and guide the nations on the earth. Selah. Let the peoples praise You, O God; let all the peoples praise You. The earth has yielded its produce; God, our God, blesses us. God blesses us, that all the ends of the earth may fear Him.

PSALM 119:153-160

Resh. Look upon my affliction and rescue me, for I do not forget Your law. Plead my cause and redeem me; revive me according to Your word. Salvation is far from the wicked, for they do not seek Your statutes. Great are Your mercies, O LORD; revive me according to Your ordinances. Many are my persecutors and my adversaries, yet I do not turn aside from Your testimonies. I behold the

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treacherous and loathe *them*, because they do not keep Your word. Consider how I love Your precepts; revive me, O LORD, according to Your lovingkindness. The sum of Your word is truth, and every one of Your righteous ordinances is everlasting.

This morning as I was settling into my daily routine, a sister in the Lord who had a need interrupted me early, before I could really get far along in my reflections. Since I sensed urgency in her voice, and she indicated that she wanted to talk to both Margaret and me, we called her back after I took our daughter to school. Interestingly, as I stated during our conversation, the Lord had put this particular person on my heart a number of times during the past few weeks, but for a variety of reasons, principally lack of time, I never initiated the call reminders that I wrote in my daytimer.

As she now relayed her needs, we were both reminded of the challenges and testing that truly come to those who are seeking to be useful in God's work. Without going into great detail, the temptation of wealth and of all the trappings of money and its attendant power (cf. 1 Timothy 6:10), were being offered to her if she compromised her principles as a godly woman. As I returned to our meditation, I wondered if our conversation had something to do with the passage for consideration today (Psalm 119:153-160).

I did not have to go very far when I was struck by the following verse that made me think about the "tempter," meaning of course, the Devil:

"Salvation is far from the wicked, for they do not seek Your statutes" (Psalm 119:155).

In our conversation, it was apparent that a "purported man of God" was using his money, power, and influence to coerce our friend into an untenable position as far as the Scriptures were concerned. She was justifiably livid about the circumstances, and all we could think about after the phone call was a strong confirmation that this "man of God" could not be saved if he were imposing his will upon this woman. It was obvious from our conversation that he was certainly not seeking the statutes of the Word of God, as they are plainly written and communicated.

It is extremely wicked for anyone to impose his or her will forcibly upon someone else, especially under the guise of "God told me so..." and/or "This is your spiritual destiny..." These strong declarations, coupled with the caveat that great wealth will be showered upon you, should remind us immediately of Satan's temptation of Yeshua in the desert. Thankfully, our Spirit-filled friend had thought of those same verses, so I thought I would take another look at them to be reminded of how Yeshua handled the Adversary:

"And Yeshua answered him, 'It is written, "MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE" [Deuteronomy 8:3].' And he led Him up and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, 'I will give You all this domain and its glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to

whomever I wish. Therefore if You worship before me, it shall all be Yours.’ Yeshua answered him, ‘It is written, “YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD AND SERVE HIM ONLY” [Deuteronomy 6:13].’ And he led Him to Jerusalem and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, ‘If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here; for it is written, “HE WILL COMMAND HIS ANGELS CONCERNING YOU TO GUARD YOU” [Psalm 91:11], and, “ON *their* HANDS THEY WILL BEAR YOU UP, SO THAT YOU WILL NOT STRIKE YOUR FOOT AGAINST A STONE” [Psalm 91:12].’ And Yeshua answered and said to him, ‘It is said, ‘YOU SHALL NOT PUT THE LORD YOUR GOD TO THE TEST’ [Deuteronomy 6:16].” When the devil had finished every temptation, he left Him until an opportune time” (Luke 4:4-13).

What is interesting to note in this passage is the fact that Yeshua always answered the Tempter with a response from the Scriptures, and specifically quoted from Deuteronomy 8:3; 6:13, 16. It was Yeshua’s obedience here to the will of His Father **that we are to emulate** when we may be tempted to do evil, or be promised great wealth and fame.

Even when the Devil quoted the Scriptures from Psalm 91—which should obviously go to show that even “purported servants of God” can hijack Scripture for their own sordid ends—the use of God’s Word and the temptation to believe a lie did not at all move the Lord into stumbling. Should Yeshua (Jesus) have fallen prey to the Adversary’s word, then He would not have accomplished the work of redemption as our sinless sacrifice. Interestingly, as I read through the balance of Psalm 91, I was immediately taken to the Hebrew noun *yeshuah*, which is translated “salvation” in Psalm 119:155 and Psalm 91:16:

“Because he has loved Me, therefore I will deliver him; I will set him *securely* on high, because he has known My name. He will call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will rescue him and honor him. With a long life I will satisfy him and let him see **My salvation** [*b’yeshuati*]” (Psalm 91:14-16).

Here in these verses, it is very clear that we must love the Lord, know Him, and call upon Him—in order to have Him answer us in our troubles and rescue us from the snares of Satan. Once we truly believe this and have our heart changed from a heart of stone into a heart of flesh, then with the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, we will be able to discern when the wiles and temptations of the Devil come our way. *Spiritual tests will often never go away*, and I am delighted to say that our friend passed her test through the strength she has in Messiah Yeshua. Our prayers will be directed toward the one evidencing wickedness, because unless he receives the salvation of Yeshua, he falls into the category that the Psalmist has us consider further:

“Many are my persecutors and my adversaries, *yet* I do not turn aside from Your testimonies. I behold the treacherous and loathe *them*, because they do not keep Your word” (Psalm 119:157-158).

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This is a sober reminder that there are indeed many non-Believers who might think they are a part of God's people, but by their actions, they reveal the true motives of their hearts. They are adversarial toward God's true children and they berate or persecute them, sometimes using the Bible to justify their motivations. According to today's reflection, it is perfectly legitimate to "loathe" the treacherous or "look at the faithless with disgust" (RSV), because of their sinful actions. Is this not what Yeshua did when He was sparring with the Adversary? He used Scripture and quoted it to put the Tempter in his place.

Coming to the end of the conversation with our friend, since I had already looked at Psalm 119 and was directed to consider Psalm 139 because of some parallel verses in Psalm 139:17, 21, it was easy for me to tell her that the Holy One of Israel had prepared her for this very real temptation. The Creator knew that she was properly prepared because she was a woman of the Word and could discern His voice. Quite naturally, when the trial arose, she was totally prepared to respond faithfully with the truth. As this Psalm so eloquently declares,

"For You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother's womb. I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from You, when I was made in secret, *and* skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth; Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; and in Your book were all written the days that were ordained *for me*, when as yet there was not one of them. How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How vast is the sum of them! If I should count them, they would outnumber the sand. When I awake, I am still with You. O that You would slay the wicked, O God; depart from me, therefore, men of bloodshed. For they speak against you wickedly, and Your enemies take *your name* in vain. Do I not hate those who hate You, O LORD? And do I not loathe those who rise up against You? I hate them with the utmost hatred; they have become my enemies. Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way" (Psalm 139:13-24).

The sad thing, though, is that our temporary adversaries often become our permanent enemies. When this occurs, it is incumbent upon each of us **to pray that they repent and be redeemed**. This is exactly how we concluded our phone visit, as we prayed for the man hurting our friend, and that he would turn from his wicked ways. Yet as much as this recent scene should encourage us to have fortitude, maintaining one's integrity *is an ongoing process*. **We have to resist temptation!**

My stepson John McKee, editor of Messianic Apologetics, has one of the most consistent work ethics I have ever seen. He commonly reminds me that nowhere in the Bible are God's people ever promised anything beyond basic essentials. He frequently quotes 1 Timothy 6:8, "If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content." Other than food, clothing, and shelter—everything else in life is

a bonus! In my time not only as his parent, but also one who has served alongside him in ministry, I have notably witnessed how: John has deliberately turned down what appear to be many ministry “opportunities” and speaking engagements for greater popularity and income, because he knows that they would deter him from his life calling and work (which includes a huge writing and research burden), forcing him to compromise his principles. I know this is partially a credit to how I have helped raise him, but it is also a major part of how he honors the legacy of his late father and his grandfathers before him.

The same has also been widely true for me as I have often turned away financial success in commercial real estate and other endeavors, to put the work of Outreach Israel Ministries *first*. A verse that frequently comes to my mind is Luke 9:62, where Yeshua says, “No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.” The ability to have spiritual fortitude and actually say “No!” can be difficult—especially when you might see others prosper (even others in ministry). Fortitude is required, though, when the Lord has given you particular talents and abilities for *specific tasks*, which cannot be deterred and will take a great deal of time and commitment. A few of us have actually developed what can possibly be described as a “spiritual stubbornness,” but one that is geared *not* toward opposing the will of God, but in being opposed toward the temptations and abuses of wealth, power, and fame.

Is there anything that you have been tempted by, which will take you away from the work of God’s Kingdom? Do you need the strength to stand up to the Devil?