

DAY FORTY

“PRAYER ASSIGNMENT”

PSALM 99:1-9

As Day #40 of our Omer Count arrives, the memories of the events following Yeshua’s resurrection some two thousand years ago vividly come to mind. On the fortieth day of that ancient Omer Count, Yeshua the Messiah would have ascended into Heaven. Awakening with these thoughts, I was prompted to consider some of the occurrences throughout Scripture when a forty-day time period represents some significant events. However, before leaping back into the historical records and reflecting upon any parallels that might exist, please take the time to read the following Psalm selections as you offer up praise to the Lord:

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 99:1-9

The LORD reigns, let the peoples tremble; He is enthroned *above* the cherubim, let the earth shake! The LORD is great in Zion, and He is exalted above all the peoples. Let them praise Your great and awesome name; Holy is He. The strength of the King loves justice; You have established equity; You have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob. Exalt the LORD our God and worship at His footstool; holy is He. Moses and Aaron were among His priests, and Samuel was among those who called on His name; they called upon the LORD and He answered them. He spoke to them in the pillar of cloud; they kept His testimonies and the statute that He gave them. O the LORD our God, You answered them; You were a forgiving God to them, and *yet* an avenger of their *evil* deeds. Exalt the LORD our God and worship at His holy hill, for holy is the LORD our God.

COUNTING THE OMER

It was on the fortieth day after His resurrection from the dead, that Yeshua ascended to the right hand of the Father in Heaven. Luke records what happened in the opening verses of the Book of Acts:

“The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Yeshua began to do and teach, until the day when He was taken up *to heaven*, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen. To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over *a period of forty days* and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God. Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, ‘Which,’ *He said*, ‘you heard of from Me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.’ So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, ‘Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?’ He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.’ **And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.** And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. They also said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Yeshua, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven’” (Acts 1:1-11).

Here we are told that Yeshua spent a period of forty days with His Apostles and with various others, teaching them about things concerning the Kingdom of God. Can you imagine being at such a “Bible study” like this (cf. Luke 22:44)? The Savior Himself gave instruction and teaching about all of the significant events that had just happened surrounding His execution and resurrection. You might be in such awe—sitting in the presence of the Savior—that you could not do much more than possibly stare at the scars on His hands and feet (cf. John 20:25), recognizing that *your sin* is what actually nailed Him to the cross.

As the Lord gathered His followers together in Jerusalem, He told them that they were to wait for the empowerment that had been promised (Acts 1:4). Once completely filled with the power of the Holy Spirit and readied for some key missional work—they were to go forth from Jerusalem, to Judea and Samaria, and to the remotest parts of Planet Earth with the good news that the Savior of humanity had arrived and paid the price for sin. *The restoration of the Kingdom to Israel was at hand!* As you might imagine, this had to be an exhilarating experience for these First Century saints.

The first followers of Yeshua were Torah obedient Jews, who were probably Counting the Omer along with the Messiah for the forty days before He departed, and for the ten days before the Feast of Weeks was celebrated. Today as I consider the fortieth day, I naturally reflect upon those perplexed people, and how they might have reacted when the Messiah left them and ascended into Heaven. How would they function as not only His followers, or even those who had spent a great deal of personal time being trained by Him—but as those who would have to go forth into the (largely unknown Roman) world without Him? We should all be familiar with how the Gospel of Matthew closes with what is commonly called the Great Commission:

“But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Yeshua had designated. When they saw Him, they worshiped *Him*; but some were doubtful. And

Yeshua came up and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age’” (Matthew 28:16-20).

After Yeshua ascended into Heaven, His followers were doubtlessly getting excited about *Shavuot* coming soon. In a mere ten days or so, as the streets of Jerusalem were filling with pilgrims from all over the Roman Empire, the anticipation in the crowd was building. Multiple witnesses were confirming the eyewitness accounts of the resurrected Savior’s appearances to them and what He told them. *Can you imagine the expectations that were stirring?* Was this not the time that commemorated the giving of the Torah? Certainly, the forty days and forty nights that Moses spent on Mount Sinai were being considered. Someone might have remembered how it rained for forty days and forty nights during the Flood (Genesis 7:12). *What was being discussed during this time?* We can only speculate.

Perhaps some remembered the days when John the Baptizer was down in the Jordan River, immersing people in water, for those coming from Jerusalem who sincerely desired to be clean before the Holy One. Someone could have quoted John’s declarations, when he referred to the immersion of water versus the immersion of the Holy Spirit, as compared to the immersion of fire and damnation:

“John answered and said to them all, **‘As for me, I baptize you with water; but One is coming who is mightier than I,** and I am not fit to untie the thong of His sandals; **He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.** His winnowing fork is in His hand to thoroughly clear His threshing floor, and to gather the wheat into His barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire’” (Luke 3:16-17).¹

Continuing to wait upon the Holy Spirit, talking about the past forty days they had just spent with the Messiah, perhaps someone would have recalled the history of Elijah, when he was depressed during some of his battles with Jezebel and was sent to Mount Horeb for a forty-day fast. The Believers might have talked about the Spirit of the Lord being a mighty wind or a raging fire, but as they recalled their Scriptures they would be more reminded of how the Holy Spirit came in a small, gentle blowing of the wind:

“The angel of the LORD came again a second time and touched him and said, ‘Arise, eat, because the journey is too great for you.’ So he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mountain of God. Then he came there to a cave and lodged there; and behold, the word of the LORD *came* to him, and He said to him, ‘What are you doing here, Elijah?’ He said, ‘I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars and killed Your prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.’ So He said, ‘Go forth and stand on the mountain before the LORD.’ And behold, the LORD was passing by! And a great and strong wind was rending the mountains and breaking in pieces the rocks before the LORD; *but* the LORD *was* not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, *but* the LORD *was* not in the earthquake. After the earthquake a fire, *but* the LORD *was* not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of a gentle blowing. When Elijah heard *it*, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. And behold, a voice *came* to him and said, ‘What are you doing here, Elijah?’” (1 Kings 19:7-13).

¹ Consult the FAQ, “Fire Baptism,” and how this is most frequently a reference to judgment.

COUNTING THE OMER

If Yeshua's Disciples at all discussed this, it could have reminded them how He had been taken into the wilderness for a similar forty-day fast, when He was being tempted by the Devil. Remembering that Yeshua combated the lure of Satan, by quoting back to him verses from the Tanakh Scriptures, would have been very encouraging.² This remembrance would have been most beneficial for those waiting in Jerusalem and those beginning to gather, because there is clear evidence that when the Spirit of God is getting ready to move, the Adversary then becomes very active. When the Devil knows that spiritual ground is getting ready to be taken, he does all that he can to discourage those who are being prepared for victory. It should not be surprising how the Disciples gathered together to pray all in one accord:

“When they had entered *the city*, they went up to the upper room where they were staying; that is, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James *the son of Alphaeus*, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas *the son of James*. These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with *the women*, and Mary the mother of Yeshua, and with His brothers” (Acts 1:13-14).

As the final days before the Feast of Weeks or Day of Pentecost were upon the Disciples and Apostles, they gathered to pray in one accord, dedicating themselves to one another and various ministerial needs. Not only were all of the men and women praying and discussing all of the issues of the day, but they were also arranging things in proper order as they prepared for *Shavuot*. The matter of replacing Judas Iscariot arose, and the Apostles cast lots to replace Judas with Matthias, who brought the total number back to twelve (Acts 1:26).

We are reminded in our Psalm reflection for today (Psalm 99:1-9) that individuals like Moses, Aaron, and Samuel all called upon the Lord for His mercy, grace, justice, and protection. The concluding verses of Psalm 99 tell us that God answered their requests:

“O LORD our God, You answered them; You were a forgiving God to them, and yet an avenger of their *evil* deeds. Exalt the LORD our God and worship at His holy hill, for holy is the LORD our God” (Psalm 99:8-9).

Let us approach Him on His holy hill for the next ten days, interceding for what He wants to see accomplished, as we continue Counting the Omer and commemorate the Feast of Weeks very soon. *Perhaps a small whisper will be discernible.* Listen for His small quiet wind of a voice, as you tackle this prayer assignment and follow in the footsteps of our forbearers in the faith.

² Mark 1:12-13; Matthew 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13.