

DAY NINE

“DISCERNMENT AND KNOWLEDGE”

PSALM 119:65-72

As we continue to Count the Omer, we are still at the mercy of what is happening in the world in which we live. Day by day, as we focus on the command to Count the Omer (Leviticus 23:15-16) on the inspiring trail to the Feast of Weeks or *Shavuot*, the recommended meditations from Psalms are prompting me to thoughts and conclusions that definitely have the imprimatur of the Holy Spirit. For those who are seeking to be led by the Spirit and to walk by the Spirit, the encouragement to continue is beyond explanation! But before commenting on some seemingly random input, as seen through the grid of the Scriptures, please take the time to read today's selections:

PSALM 67:1-7

For the choir director; with stringed instruments. A Psalm. 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 119:65-72

Teth. You have dealt well with Your servant, O LORD, according to Your word. Teach me good discernment and knowledge, for I believe in Your commandments. Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word. You are good and do good; teach me Your statutes. The arrogant have forged a lie against me; with all my heart I will observe Your precepts. Their heart is covered with fat, but I delight in Your law. It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes. The law of Your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces.

The *tet* (ט) section of Psalm 119 that we are considering relates to the concept of “good discernment and knowledge,” *tov ta'am v'da'at* (טוֹב טַעַם וְדַעַת). Over and over, the Hebrew word here for “good,” *tov* (טוֹב), is used with a variety of derivations that I

COUNTING THE OMER

never knew existed until doing some word searches.¹ Amazingly, I learned how the Hebrew language takes the concept of goodness and dishes it up in many different ways. Following a thread of examination into a variety of passages in the Scriptures is always a delightful way to sense the Spirit leading one into greater understanding. Somehow the interconnectivity of different passages just seems to be illumined in one's mind as you bounce from one section of Scripture to another. I thank the Lord for some of the Bible software available that allows me to move from one verse to the next at the click of a mouse!

As I was enjoying my “surfing” through the Bible, one verse in today’s Psalm selection (Psalm 119:65-72) really caught my attention. The ardent plea expressed by the Psalmist to cry out to God to be taught “good discernment and knowledge” just could not go unnoticed and unconsidered:

“Teach me good sense and knowledge, for I have put my trust in Your commandments” (Psalm 119:66, NJPS).

What serious follower of the Messiah of Israel does not desire to be able to discern and have the knowledge to make prudent decisions in life? Making this request of the Holy One is a good thing. Solomon, often considered the wisest man to ever live, was blessed when he asked God for discernment:

“God said to him, ‘Because you have asked this thing and have not asked for yourself long life, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have you asked for the life of your enemies, **but have asked for yourself discernment** to understand justice, behold, I have done according to your words. Behold, I have given you a wise and discerning heart, so that there has been no one like you before you, nor shall one like you arise after you” (1 Kings 3:11-12).

The Hebrew word translated as “discernment” in Psalm 119:66 is *ta’am* (טַעַם),² beginning with a *tet*, the ninth letter of the *alef-bet* that corresponds to the ninth day of Counting the Omer. Looking more closely at some other places where the word *ta’am* is used, I wanted to see if there were some things which would help me better understand why the Psalmist was truly asking to be taught.

As I reviewed some of these places, it was almost like the word *ta’am* had something to do with a person’s taste for manna or wine.³ The old expression, “A person’s taste is found in his mouth,” came to mind. Reviewing some other verses where *ta’am* is used to actually describe a person’s discernment or reason,⁴ a passage from Job that expresses Job’s opinion about his contemporaries really riveted my attention. Looking at Job 12:20, where *ta’am* is used for “discernment,” I was prompted to read the entire chapter to see the context of what was being related:

“He deprives the trusted ones of speech and takes away the discernment [ta’am] of the elders” (Job 12:20).

Reading through Job ch. 12, I was reminded of a television interview that I had watched in the early morning hours (1:00-2:00 A.M.), a repeat broadcast of “Meet the Press.” This unusual “after midnight” viewing made the words of Job have some special

¹ Cf. Andrew Bowling, “טַרְבֵּי,” in R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 2 vols (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 1:1345-346.

² *Ta’am* actually means “taste, judgement,” but “fig. judgement, discretion, discernment” (BDB, 381).

³ Including: Exodus 16:31; Numbers 11:8; 1 Samuel 14:24, 29, 43; 21:14; 25:33; 2 Samuel 3:35; 19:36; Job 6:6; 12:11; 34:3; Jeremiah 48:11; Jonah 3:7.

⁴ Including: Job 12:20; Psalm 34:1, 9; 119:66.

meaning. I had watched a media interview of one of the two men running in the 2004 presidential election—of someone possibly positioned to be the leader of the “free world,” and his “vision” for America and the globe—who, at least in my opinion, did not reflect the ideology of one who spent that much time in the Holy Scriptures. I found the interview and views expressed to be very disconcerting, but after reflecting upon the words of Job, the reality that “there is nothing new under the sun” (cf. Ecclesiastes 1:9), comforted my soul.

I am compelled to reproduce Job 12 in its entirety for you, so you can see the context of what I saw in those words. (Is it not amazing how one little word search can open up so much Scripture to consider?)

“Then Job responded, ‘Truly then you are the people, and with you wisdom will die! But I have intelligence as well as you; I am not inferior to you. And who does not know such things as these? I am a joke to my friends, the one who called on God and He answered him; the just *and* blameless *man* is a joke. **He who is at ease holds calamity in contempt, as prepared for those whose feet slip.** The tents of the destroyers prosper, and those who provoke God are secure, whom God brings into their power. But now ask the beasts, and let them teach you; and the birds of the heavens, and let them tell you. Or speak to the earth, and let it teach you; and let the fish of the sea declare to you. **Who among all these does not know that the hand of the LORD has done this, in whose hand is the life of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind? Does not the ear test words, as the palate tastes its food? Wisdom is with aged men, with long life is understanding. With Him are wisdom and might; to Him belong counsel and understanding.** Behold, He tears down, and it cannot be rebuilt; He imprisons a man, and there can be no release. Behold, He restrains the waters, and they dry up; and He sends them out, and they inundate the earth. With Him are strength and sound wisdom, the misled and the misleader belong to Him. He makes counselors walk barefoot and makes fools of judges. He loosens the bond of kings and binds their loins with a girdle. He makes priests walk barefoot and overthrows the secure ones. **He deprives the trusted ones of speech and takes away the discernment [ta’am] of the elders.** He pours contempt on nobles and loosens the belt of the strong. He reveals mysteries from the darkness and brings the deep darkness into light. He makes the nations great, then destroys them; He enlarges the nations, then leads them away. He deprives of intelligence the chiefs of the earth's people and makes them wander in a pathless waste. They grope in darkness with no light, and He makes them stagger like a drunken man” (Job 12:1-25).

I have taken the liberty **to bolden** some of the verses that really caught my attention. While meditating upon Psalm 119:66 and asking the Holy One of Israel to teach me good discernment and knowledge, because I believe in the importance of His commandments, by reading Job ch. 12 I ascertained that Job had already made some very enlightening comments about human beings and who *is really responsible* for what is taking place in the created order.

I then found myself focusing again on Job 12:20b, and its comment about “[taking] away the reason [ta’am] of elders” (NJPS). I considered this lack of discernment, and the character that those in positions of great influence, particularly in politics, often demonstrate. As the noble and privileged of society, they might have the palate to taste the nuances of difference between fine food and wine, but what have they been feasting upon and digesting to sharpen their judgment for things of the Lord? The author of Hebrews says

COUNTING THE OMER

that fervent consumption of the Holy Scriptures brings great discernment that penetrates to the very thoughts and intentions of the heart:

“For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12).

As I read the words of Job, who obviously knew how the Creator was responsible for all things going on in His universe, I am comforted. Coming to a pause in his soliloquy, he says,

“He makes nations great, and destroys them; he enlarges nations, and disperses them. He deprives the leaders of the earth of their reason; he sends them wandering through a trackless waste” (Job 12:23-24, NIV).

Job was not concerned about what he witnessed in his time, and how unrighteous people had influence. But what Job says can likely also be applied to many of those who we might call “Believers” today. If you take the first part of Job 12:20a, and read it a little closely, it is quite possible that Job is referring to “the trusted ones” or the presumed “Believers” of his time: “He deprives the **trusted ones** of speech” (Job 12:20a).

The participle *ne’emanim* (נְאֵמָנִים), rendered as “trusted ones” (the NIV has “trusted advisers”), is derived from the verb *aman* (אָמַן). *Aman* is a key term used throughout the Bible, much of it focused on one’s belief, trust, and faith in God.⁵

Is it possible that Job’s statement includes a warning to today’s Believers that God could deprive His own “trusted ones” the opportunity to speak, and that He might even take away their ability to tastefully discern? When you look at Job’s words, and how He makes the priests walk barefoot, overthrows the secure ones, pours contempt on the nobles, and loosens the belt of the strong—you could conclude that God does take away the discernment of elders that is driven by taste, or by their fleshly appetites.

On the other hand, perhaps the good discernment or *tov ta’am* (טוֹב טַעַם), that Psalm 119:66 speaks about, is that which Abigail referred to when she pleaded with King David to spare her worthless husband Nabal:

“Then David said to Abigail, ‘Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me, and blessed be your discernment [*ta’am*], and blessed be you, who have kept me this day from bloodshed and from avenging myself by my own hand’ (1 Samuel 25:32-33).

In David’s passion to make things right with Nabal for his insults, David instead listened to the words of Abigail and did not take up the offense with Nabal. Instead, the Lord took Nabal’s life in less than two weeks:

“Nevertheless, as the LORD God of Israel lives, who has restrained me from harming you, unless you had come quickly to meet me, surely there would not have been left to Nabal until the morning light as much as one male. So David received from her hand what she had brought him and said to her, ‘Go up to your house in peace. See, I have listened to you and granted your request.’ Then Abigail came to Nabal, and behold, he was holding a feast in his house, like the feast of a king. And Nabal’s heart was merry within him, for he was very drunk; so she did not tell him anything at all until the morning light. But in the morning, when the wine had gone out of Nabal, his wife told

⁵ Cf. Jack B. Scott, “אָמַן,” in *TWOT*, 1:51-53.

him these things, and his heart died within him so that he became *as a stone*. **About ten days later, the LORD struck Nabal and he died**” (1 Samuel 25:34-38).

Is this the *tov ta'am* that the Psalmist is referring to when he asks the Lord to teach him “good discernment”? It could at least be one possible example of it. Yet also within his request to God in Psalm 119:66, he implores Him for knowledge.

When you consider the first time the word *da'at* (דַּעַת) is used in the Torah, note that it appears in Genesis 2:9 in reference to the Tree of the Knowledge—*da'at*—of Good and Evil:

“Out of the ground the LORD God caused to grow every tree that is pleasing to the sight and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Genesis 2:9).

This tree was inherently not bad, because when our Creator looked at everything He created, He said it was good (Genesis 1:31). But it was Adam and Eve’s unwillingness to obey His command not to eat from this tree (Genesis 2:17), which caused them to fall. Later, we are told how it is the fear of the Lord that is the beginning of *true* knowledge, and that fools despise wisdom and instruction:

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge [*da'at*]; fools despise wisdom and instruction” (Proverbs 1:7a).

Need I say more? If there were ever a time that we needed to have good discernment and knowledge, *now is the time!* So friends, follow today’s instruction and plead with our Heavenly Father to teach you good discernment and knowledge, while confessing with your mouth that you believe in His commandments and desire Him to lead you. Perhaps now we can all better appreciate the prayer of the Apostle Paul to the Philippians, when telling them that through **real knowledge and all discernment**, their love would abound:

“And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Messiah” (Philippians 1:9-10).

And can you believe it? We are only forty-one days from *Shavuot!*

⁶ Heb. *etz ha'da'at tov v'ra* (עֵץ הַדַּעַת טוֹב וְרָע).