

# DAY TWENTY-THREE

## “HOW BLESSED”

### PSALM 1:1-6

Now that we have completed our readings from Psalm 119, for the remaining twenty-eight days of Counting the Omer, we are going to let the beautiful words of several other Psalms permeate our beings and draw us closer to God in our walk with Him. We begin this new pattern with Psalm 1, and contend with its elegant yet poignant message. I can think about the multitude of times that I have turned to this Psalm for comfort and direction. In a like manner for millennia, millions of followers of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob have memorized this text because of the wisdom imparted to those who seek to be blessed by Him. Before I comment on some of the counsel which is expressed, please take the time to consider our selection for today:

### 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 1:1-6

**How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night. He will be like a tree *firmly* planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither; and in whatever he does, he prospers. The wicked are not so, but they are like chaff which the wind drives away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.**

## COUNTING THE OMER

Upon my first reading of this Psalm, my attention was drawn to the word “delight,”<sup>1</sup> and how our delight or pleasure should be found in the Instruction of God, making us effective as His people: **“the teaching of the LORD is his delight, and he studies that teaching day and night”** (Psalm 1:2, NJPS). *This runs most contrary to many of the places where people try to find “pleasure”!* We must turn to God and to His Word, and find true satisfaction in it.

Since establishing a Torah foundation is critical in an hour when the emerging Messianic movement is trying to spiritually mature,<sup>2</sup> my regular discipline in writing TorahScope commentaries, used to encourage Believers to embrace a consistent study of Moses’ Teaching, obviously influenced my thoughts. After considering some parallel verses that further describe either the delight we are to have, or the lack thereof (1 Samuel 15:22; Isaiah 58:13; Hosea 8:8; Ecclesiastes 12:1), I began to reduce my thoughts to writing and was directed to consider the opening words “How blessed is the one...,” *ashrei-ha’ish* (אַשְׁרֵי־הָאִישׁ; Psalm 1:1).

In this statement which begins our selection (Psalm 1:1-6), I found instruction that went well beyond my nominal understanding of Hebrew. This morning I was humbly reminded by the seemingly simple exclamation, “How blessed,” that there were a few things still yet to be uncovered about Hebrew terms frequently used in Scripture, and how you may assume from an English reading that one word is employed, when the source text actually may use something else. (This can obviously also be true when reading from an English translation of the Greek Apostolic Scriptures.)

For years I thought that the only Hebrew term for “bless” was seen in the various derivations of the verb *barakh* (בָּרַךְ),<sup>3</sup> and indeed, one encounters *baruch* (בָּרוּךְ) or “Blessed...” most frequently in traditional Jewish liturgy. So to my surprise, as I began my study this morning of the phrase “How blessed,” I was temporarily jolted from my lofty perch regarding my memorization of the “*baruchas*.” I found that the Hebrew word *esher* (אֶשֶׁר),<sup>4</sup> appearing as *ashrei* (אַשְׁרֵי), was rendered as “blessed.” How did I not realize that this was a different Hebrew term for “blessed”? I did not immediately remember that when I began the first day of our Omer Count, that the first stanza of Psalm 119 actually used this term twice in the first two verses:

“Aleph. How **blessed** [*esher*] are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the LORD. How **blessed** [*esher*] are those who observe His testimonies, who seek Him with all *their* heart” (Psalm 119:1-2).

Looking at some differences between the terms *barakh* and *esher*, I found a few interesting things. The Hebrew verb *barakh* is used some 141 times in the Torah or Pentateuch,<sup>5</sup> with *esher* used only a single time. I thought this was rather odd, because in my cognitive thoughts, I was not able to discern that much of a difference. I looked at the single time *esher* is used in the Torah, and found that it occurs only just after Moses has blessed all of Israel and the individual tribes:

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<sup>1</sup> Heb. *cheifetz* (חִפֵּץ).

<sup>2</sup> For further consideration, consult the *Messianic Torah Helper* by Messianic Apologetics (forthcoming).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *BDB*, pp 138-139.

<sup>4</sup> “happiness, blessedness” (*Ibid.*, 80).

<sup>5</sup> This figure was determined using a lemma search of the Hebrew Tanakh (WTT), Pentateuch, in BibleWorks 7.0.

“There is none like the God of Jeshurun, who rides the heavens to your help, and through the skies in His majesty. The eternal God is a dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms; and He drove out the enemy from before you, and said, ‘Destroy!’ So Israel dwells in security, the fountain of Jacob secluded, in a land of grain and new wine; His heavens also drop down dew. **Blessed** [*esher*] are you, O Israel; who is like you, a people saved by the LORD, who is the shield of your help and the sword of your majesty! So your enemies will cringe before you, and you will tread upon their high places” (Deuteronomy 33:26-29).

As I read this, and then looked at some of the 141 times where *barakh* is used, I began to discern a possible difference, which became even more apparent as I read various verses in the Tanakh that employ *esher*. It seems that God’s involvement in the “*barukhas*” was more evident, and that human happiness or pleasure was the main focus of the times when *esher* was used.<sup>6</sup> One example of this is seen in how the Queen of Sheba uses *esher* to describe those who served in Solomon’s court, who had the blessing of hearing his wisdom:

“How **blessed** [*esher*] are your men, how **blessed** [*esher*] are these your servants who stand before you continually *and* hear your wisdom. **Blessed** [*barakh*] be the LORD your God who delighted in you to set you on the throne of Israel; because the LORD loved Israel forever, therefore He made you king, to do justice and righteousness” (1 Kings 10:8-9; cf. 2 Chronicles 9:7-8).

Here, we see that *barakh* is slightly contrasted with *esher*, denoting Divine blessing; *esher* may more easily imply some degree of material blessing.

The Book of Job describes a “happy” person, employing *esher* to indicate human happiness. The concepts of prosperity, mercy, all relate to life on Earth:

“Behold, how **happy** [*esher*] is the man whom God reproves, so do not despise the discipline of the Almighty. For He inflicts pain, and gives relief; He wounds, and His hands *also* heal. From six troubles He will deliver you, even in seven evil will not touch you. In famine He will redeem you from death, and in war from the power of the sword. You will be hidden from the scourge of the tongue, and you will not be afraid of violence when it comes. You will laugh at violence and famine, and you will not be afraid of wild beasts. For you will be in league with the stones of the field, and the beasts of the field will be at peace with you. You will know that your tent is secure, for you will visit your abode and fear no loss. You will know also that your descendants will be many, and your offspring as the grass of the earth. You will come to the grave in full vigor, like the stacking of grain in its season. Behold this; we have investigated it, *and* so it is. Hear it, and know for yourself” (Job 5:17-27).

Certainly, any individual who receives the protection or blessing of God, as just described in Job, will be happy and blessed all the days of his life.

Returning to the opening words of Psalm 1, you realize that “How blessed” here is really a term that points specifically at *your* happiness, prosperity, health, and welfare as a human being. The need for us to extend blessings to our Creator God is one thing—and we are not to ever take it lightly. But when you realize that His blessings can be much more personalized, then taking His Instruction and applying it to your life is more tangible, with results that affect how we conduct ourselves in obedience to Him.

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Victor P. Hamilton, “אֵשֶׁר,” in *TWOT*, 1:80-81.

## COUNTING THE OMER

The Psalmist's admonition to not walk in the counsel of the wicked, stand in the path of the sinful, or sit in the seat of scoffers (Psalm 1:1), is something that one should most definitely follow if he or she desires a happy and blessed life! As a benefit of avoiding such pitfalls, one instead can delight in God's Torah and meditate upon it day and night (Psalm 1:2). The rewards of obedience are success in *all* that one does, which not only include future rewards in the Kingdom of Heaven, but rewards to be experienced *right now* on Planet Earth! But on the other hand, the consequence of disobedience is abandonment, like chaff in the wind (Psalm 1:4).

Brothers and sisters, plant yourself by the streams of living waters (Psalm 1:3) as we continue our Counting of the Omer and meditate upon His Word, moving closer toward the Feast of Weeks. Let your roots grow deeper into His Word for your sustenance and refreshment. Then, perhaps in time, we will be able to not only bless Him—but in due season, receive His great (material) blessings in all their fullness!