

What Does the Bible Say About Meditation?

An Introduction to Christian Meditation and Memorization

In my last post, I introduced this new series on Christian meditation and memorization by explaining why this issue was important to me and by defining some terms. In this post, I want to look at several passages from the Bible to emphasize why I believe it is critical to first meditate on any passage you might like to memorize.

The earliest mention of meditate is found in Genesis 24. To set the stage, Yitz'chak was in a field waiting for his father Avraham's servant Eliezer to return with a wife for Yitz'chak. ***"And Isaac went out to meditate in the field toward evening. And he lifted up his eyes and saw, and behold, there were camels coming."*** (Genesis 24:63 ^{ESV})

Perhaps the best known passage is: ***"Yes, keep this book of the Torah on your lips, and meditate on it day and night, so that you will take care to act according to everything written in it. Then your undertakings will prosper, and you will succeed."*** (Joshua 1:8 ^{CJB}) This is in direct response to the Torah itself. ***"These words, which I am ordering you today, are to be on your heart; and you are to teach them carefully to your children. You are to talk about them when you sit at home, when you are traveling on the road, when you lie down and when you get up."*** (Deuteronomy 6:6-7)

As you might expect, the Book of Psalms exhorts us to meditate on God's Word.

"Their delight is in Adonai's Torah; on his Torah they meditate day and night." (Psalm 1:2)

"Tremble, and do not sin; Meditate in your heart upon your bed, and be still. Selah." (Psalm 4:4 ^{NASB})

"God, within your temple we meditate on your grace." (Psalm 48:9)

"I will meditate on Your work and think about what You have done." (Psalm 77:12)

According to the Believer's Study Bible, Psalm 119 - containing 176 verses - is perfect for meditating on the Word of God.

"I will meditate on your precepts and keep my eyes on your ways." (Psalm 119:15)

"Make me understand the way of your precepts, and I will meditate on your wonders." (Psalm 119:27)

"I will lift my hands to your mitzvot, which I love; and I will meditate on your laws." (Psalm 119:48)

"Let the proud be ashamed, because they wrong me with lies; as for me, I will meditate on your precepts." (Psalm 119:78)

"How I love your Torah! I meditate on it all day." (Psalm 119:97)

"I have more understanding than all my teachers, because I meditate on your instruction." (Psalm 119:99)

"My eyes are open before the night watches, so that I can meditate on your promise." (Psalm 119:148)

"I will meditate on the glorious splendor of your majesty and on the story of your wonders." (Psalm 145:5)

We read in 1 Chronicles that King David entrusted Asaph and his relatives with the task of singing songs of thanks to the LORD, saying: ***"Sing to him. Make music to praise him. Meditate on all the miracles He has done."*** (1 Chronicles 16:9 ^{GW})

The Brit Hadashah also contains references to meditating on God's Word. Sha'ul gives the following advice to Timothy: ***"¹³ Until I come, pay attention to the public reading of the Scriptures. ¹⁴ Do not neglect your gift, which you were given through a prophecy when the body of elders gave you s'mikhah [laying on of hands, ordination, grant of authority]. ¹⁵ Be diligent about this work, throw yourself into it, so that your progress may be clear to everyone."*** (1 Timothy 4:13-15 CJB) The King James Version translates verse 15 as: ***"Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all."*** Other translators have rendered the first phrase of verse 15 as: ***"Practice these things"*** (ESV, HCSB, CEB, GW); ***"Take pains with these things"*** (NASB, NET1); ***"Be diligent about this work"*** (CJB); ***"Remember these things and think about them"*** (CEV); and, ***"Think on these things"*** (ISV). No matter the English translation, Sha'ul is clearly saying that Timothy had to put forth some effort in conveying the Word of God to the Kehilah.

In his second letter to Timothy, Sha'ul wrote: ***"Meditate on Jesus Christ, who was raised from the dead and is a descendant of David. This is the gospel I tell others."*** (2 Timothy 2:8 ISV) Most other translations use ***"remember"*** in place of ***"meditate."*** Personally, I like the Message paraphrase: ***"Fix this picture firmly in your mind."*** It personally helps me to visualize what I am meditating on. A picture can truly be worth a thousand words.

Interestingly, Yeshua actually warned His talmidim ***not*** to meditate when they were under persecution as recorded by Luke. ***"¹³ This will be your opportunity to bear witness. ¹⁴ Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer, ¹⁵ for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict."*** (Luke 21:13-15 ESV emphasis added) Other translators use the phrase ***"not to worry about"*** or ***"not to prepare."*** This admonition is clearly indicating that the Ruach will give us what we need to say to our accusers. (See Yochanan 14:26)

John MacArthur has this to say about this passage: ***"To cite this passage and others like it (Luke 12:11; Matthew 10:19) to justify the neglect of study and meditation is to twist the meaning of Scripture. This verse is meant as a comfort for those under life-threatening persecution, not an excuse for laziness in ministry. The exact same expression is used in Luke 12:22, speaking of concern for one's material necessities. In neither context was Jesus condemning legitimate toil and preparation. He was promising the Holy Spirit's aid for times of persecution when there can be no preparation."*** ¹

In my next post, we will take a closer look at how to meditate on God's Word.

¹ The MacArthur Study Bible.