

## HOPE FOR THE SMOLDERING WICK

### A Devotional Meditation on Emor (Say)

Leviticus 21:1-24:23; Ezekiel 44:15-31; Isaiah 42:1-4;  
Matthew 5:14, 12:9-21; John 4:1-29; 8:12; Ephesians 2:11-14; Revelation 2:1-7

Albert J. McCarn

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Usually, it's easy to see why Matthew connects aspects of Messiah Yeshua's life to passages from Moses and the Prophets, but occasionally the connections are difficult to understand. One example occurs just after Yeshua healed a man's withered hand on the Sabbath Day. That miracle brought a confrontation with some of the Pharisees, with the result that they began to conspire against Yeshua. Matthew then explains:



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Jesus, aware of this, withdrew from there. And many followed him, and he healed them all and ordered them not to make him known. This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah:

“Behold, my servant whom I have chosen,  
my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased.  
I will put my Spirit upon him,  
and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles.  
He will not quarrel or cry aloud,  
nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets;  
a bruised reed he will not break,  
and a smoldering wick he will not quench,  
until he brings justice to victory;  
and in his name the Gentiles will hope.”

Matthew 12:15-21 ESV

It's the part about the smoldering wick that seems out of place. Everything else in this passage Matthew quotes from Isaiah 42 makes sense. That chapter is one of several in Isaiah that describe God's Servant, which we understand to be Messiah Yeshua.

One of the Jewish objections to the claim that Yeshua is the Messiah is that he didn't do everything Messiah is supposed to do. They are right, but that's not a problem for Christians since we understand what is not yet fulfilled will be accomplished at Messiah's Second Coming. Consider, for example, the smoldering wick which Messiah will not quench. We could interpret that as the light of God which is flickering in the wavering hearts of his people, or in congregations and assemblies that have lost that holy fire of his presence. On his return, however, he will deal with those smoldering wicks, such as the one in the congregation at Ephesus. According to Revelation, Messiah promises to remove the lampstand of the Ephesian church if they don't repent and return to their first

love. He issues similar warnings to other churches, essentially saying that they will lose their place in his Kingdom if they do not make the corrections he specifies.

That's one level of understanding. We get another when we remember that Yeshua said we, like him, are the light of the world. This is the light of God's Spirit – his presence dwelling not only with, but in his people. His people, both native born and grafted in, are the Covenant People of Israel. That's why God promised to be with them even in their exile to all the nations of the earth, as we read in Ezekiel:

Therefore, say that *Adonai Elohim* says this: 'True, I removed them far away among the nations and scattered them among the countries; nevertheless, I have been a little sanctuary for them in the countries to which they have gone.'

Ezekiel 11:16 CJB

This is another example of God keeping the Covenant for Israel when they were unable or unwilling to keep it themselves. The sanctuary is the place set apart for God's presence. We study the Torah to learn about this holy place as depicted in the Tabernacle and the Temple. A key component of the holy place is the menorah, or lampstand, which the priests are to tend so the light never goes out. That light is the symbol of God's Spirit and a visible assurance that he will always be at work in the earth to accomplish his redemptive purposes.

What happens, though, if the light of his presence is extinguished? If that could happen, then the world would be a very dark and hopeless place. That's why God could not let the sanctuary light go out even when his people let the Covenant lapse, when the Temple was destroyed and the Levitical priesthood prevented from doing their holy work, and when the two Houses of Israel were cast out of the Holy Land.

The Jewish part of God's people had the advantage of carrying the Torah with them, along with the priests and Levites who continued to teach the people how to live by God's ways. The other tribes, however, would have been completely without hope had not God pursued them and remained with them after a fashion. That's what he meant by being a "little sanctuary" for them. The light they had, small and smoldering as it was, could at least be preserved in cultural memory of a God who would one day rescue them and bring them back from exile.

That's the testimony of the Samaritan Woman. She may not have known the ways of Torah or been acceptable in Jewish society, but she knew that Messiah would come and fix everything one day. The smoldering wick in her heart was fanned into flame when Messiah declared himself to her. She was just the first of multitudes in whose hearts the smoldering wicks of the little sanctuaries kept the spark of hope alive through the ages.

It's the same hope in Jewish hearts, preserved through their desperate efforts to remain true to Torah even in the face of extinction. Now the sparks in those hearts are fanned into flame at the national resurrection of Israel and decades of unmistakable evidence that God is still at work fulfilling his promises to Abraham's seed.

This is how the glory of the Lord fills the earth, and how he extends the redemptive covenant to every tribe and tongue and family on earth. It's the work of his grace, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. That's how the smoldering wicks keep on flickering with the spark of godly hope.