



## Parasha Behar

May 21, 2022

*Torah:* Leviticus 25:1-26:2

*Haftarah:* Jeremiah 32:6-27

*Shlichim:* Romans 12:1-2

*Shabbat shalom Mishpacha!* Our *parasha* today is *Behar* which means “on the mountain.” The two primary subjects in it are the *sh’midah*, the sabbatical year, and the *yovel*, the 50<sup>th</sup> year release, in English, the Jubilee. The Hebrew word *sh’midah* refers to the seventh year of ADONAI’s seven year agricultural cycle and the *yovel* is the His fiftieth year of blessing following seven cycles of seven years. His establishing these times of blessing had several purposes. One was to give rest to the land. By letting it lie fallow, unplanted, the soil was rejuvenated and returned to its earlier fertility levels. An equally important purpose was to give relief, rest, to Israel in the form of physical and financial rest from their burdens. Regarding the land, ADONAI said: 4 “*But in the seventh year there is to be a Shabbat rest for the land—a Shabbat to Adonai. You are not to sow your field or prune your vineyard*” (Leviticus 25:4 TLV). It is a year of rest following the sixth year of planting just as the weekly *Shabbat* is a day of rest after six days of work. The land and people both require rest, which when given, results in replenishment of that which is needed.

The same principle of provision also applies to the *yovel*, the Jubilee of the 50<sup>th</sup> year. Leviticus 25:9-10 says: 9 “*Then on the tenth day of the seventh month, on Yom Kippur, you are to sound a shofar blast—you are to sound the shofar all throughout your land. 10 You are to make the fiftieth year holy, and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It is to be a Jubilee to you, when each of you is to return to his own property and each of you is to return to his family*” (Leviticus 25:9-10 TLV). The *yovel*, the Jubilee, is a special anniversary proclaimed for the 50<sup>th</sup> year. During the fiftieth year, the land was to lie fallow as it had done during the previous year, the forty-ninth year and would also lie fallow in the first year of the next seven year cycle. And, ADONAI provided abundant food for each of these three years when there was no planting.

As Yeshua’s followers here in the United States and elsewhere outside of the land of Israel today, there is no physical promise nor requirement for us. ADONAI said: 2 “*Speak to Bnei-Yisrael and tell them: When you come into the land which I give you, then the land is to keep a Shabbat to Adonai.* (Leviticus 25:2 TLV). There is a small group of farmers in Israel who observe the *sh’midah* today, but most don’t. Even though there is no physical requirement or promise outside the Land, we do see spiritual foreshadowings in the *sh’midah* and the *yovel* of future promises, promises which we will receive at Yeshua’s return. At that time all who have died in Messiah and His faithful ones who are alive will receive a permanent *sh’midah*, a permanent and eternal release from the bondage of our human shell, our body. We will move into a new phase of everlasting life in which we will then live in our new, spiritual bodies, bodies very much like the body which Yeshua received at His resurrection. That coming *sh’midah*, our release, will take place at the final *yovel*, the final Jubilee in time. It

will be announced at the final *Yom Kippur* in time when the *Great Shofar* from heaven will signal the end of time and the beginning of what is referred to symbolically as the “1000 year reign,” but in actuality is eternity. When Yeshua returns to earth as King and the *Great Shofar* is sounded, we will have already entered eternity. That took place when the Last Shofar was sounded and we rose to meet Him in the air. And, we will be with Him forever. The current observed *sh'mitah* year is happening right now, 2021-2022. Whether or not that is actually ADONAI's *sh'mitah* year is unknown. We may all be surprised when His *yovel*, His Jubilee occurs. A more detailed explanation of *Parasha Behar* and the *she'mitah* and *yovel* can be found on our website at May 25, 2019.

Last *Shabbat*, we ended with these verses: 28 *Come to Me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.* 29 *Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and 'you will find rest for your souls.'* 30 *For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.*” (Matthew 11:28-30 TLV). As Yeshua said this, He had just finished speaking about the wickedness of that generation and denouncing the towns in which he delivered most of His messages. He said “woe to Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum.” And, then He said: 25 ...., “*I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and of earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and discerning and revealed them to infants.*” (Matthew 11:25b TLV). He was referring to those who have a child-like faith. That is His message to us. We must have a child-like faith, accepting His words just as an innocent child would, without hesitation or doubt. We who are weary and burdened must go to Him and accept His spiritual rest which He has for us.

“*Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and 'you will find rest for your souls.'*” Not too many generations ago, the yoke was a familiar sight in the United States. I remember seeing yokes of oxen during my childhood, even though leather harnesses and mules were widely used here in the south then as well as tractors. But, the wooden yoke had a purpose. It was an attachment point against which an animal, or a person, would pull. Yeshua is saying to us that we are expected to pull the load which He has given us through His attachment, His yoke, and in being yoked to Him, learn what He has for us to do. Our yoke to Yeshua may be a single yoke or it is possible that we are in a double yoke with Yeshua. We don't know, but whatever it is, it is a symbol of our servitude, our submission to His will. But, it is not a difficult thing because He is gentle and humble in heart. As we take His yoke and learn from Him, we find rest for our souls, the spiritual satisfaction that we are pleasing our Master. In rabbinic Judaism, there is a metaphor called “the yoke of the *Torah*.” It refers to being free from civil duties and devoting one's time to the study of *Torah*. That is what is done in the Hassidic and orthodox *yeshivot*, the full time study of *Talmud*. That has no application for us. Another, similar yoke in rabbinic Judaism is called “the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven.” According to this, one who proclaims ADONAI is *echad* in the *Shema* accepts upon himself the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven which means being completely dedicated to the service of ADONAI, proclaiming and advancing His ways in the world. That is something which fits perfectly with our belief and is something that each of should want to do. When the *v'ahavta* is chanted a person signals acceptance of the fulfillment of the Commandments as a whole. When we say “Let these matters which I command you this day be upon your heart,” rabbinic Judaism refers to this “accepting the yoke of the Commandments.”

This, in my opinion is not far from what Yeshua is commanding us to do. He said: 15 “*If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.*” (John 14:15 TLV). The problem we have today is that no one agrees on what His commandments are, except those in Messianic

Judaism and a few others. ADONAI calls them “His commandments”: 31 “*So you are to keep My mitzvot and do them. I am Adonai.*” (Leviticus 22:31 TLV). Are Yeshua’s and ADONAI’s commandments the same? Absolutely! The Father and the Son are unified, *echad*, in everything. Yeshua said: 30 “*I and the Father are one.*” (John 10:30 TLV). Yeshua was sent to earth in flesh as the “living Word.” 1 *In the beginning was the Word. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 All things were made through Him, and apart from Him nothing was made that has come into being.* (John 1:1-3 TLV). If Yeshua made all things, He also wrote the *Torah*, the Law. He is the “living Word, the *Torah* which became flesh.”

The core of our messages is and has been that after coming to faith in Yeshua “we should serve ADONAI through keeping His commandments.” His commandments tell us exactly how to serve Him and are the only way that shows us how to serve the Father and the Son. That is what *Sha’ul* has been teaching us through the Book of Romans. Yeshua drove a stake into the ground regarding obedience when he said: 17 “*Do not think that I came to abolish the Torah or the Prophets! I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. 18 Amen, I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or serif shall ever pass away from the Torah until all things come to pass.*” (Matthew 5:17-18 TLV). He fulfilled them by correctly interpreting them and they will be in effect until heaven and earth pass away. We take Him at His word. The commandments in *Torah* which we can keep today are active for us. That’s Yeshua’s yoke. His commandments are not burdensome. Do those of you listening who keep His commandments, think they are burdensome? They are not to me. One very large reason they are not burdensome is because ADONAI has reduced the number of commandments that we are to keep. When the Temple was destroyed and the Levitical priesthood was dispersed, almost 4/5 of *Torah* commandments were made inactive. That means that we only have 125 to 150 active *Torah* commandments to follow out of an original 613 plus, plus the 1,050 commands in the writings of Yeshua’s disciples. I am smiling. Yes, there are that many found in the *Ketuvim Shlichim*, but most of them are second nature to a sincere follower of Yeshua. We do want to please Him and we do it by being obedient to Him. When we “love ADONAI with all our heart, soul and strength,” and when we “love our neighbor as ourselves,” however we do it, we are fulfilling the “yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven and taking upon ourselves Yeshua’s easy yoke.”

Returning now to Romans: 1 *I urge you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice—holy, acceptable to God—which is your spiritual service. 2 Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.* (Romans 12:1-2 TLV). This was quoted last week. We are encouraged to present our bodies to ADONAI as living sacrifices. We are to live for Yeshua. Our lives are His because He paid for them. We are to offer our lives to Him as living sacrifices. The question was asked last *Shabbat*: “what is your LSL,” your “living sacrifice” level? Have you thought about it? If Yeshua came to you today and asked you how well you were serving Him, would you be comfortable with your answer? We would all, myself included, score pretty low on Yeshua’s hot meter. He is calling us all to do better.

We are not to be conformed to “this world.” This world’s ways are not Yeshua’s ways. This world’s ways are carnal and fleshly and His world’s ways are spiritual and holy. Our eternal citizenship is in heaven and it’s “His world” to which we are to be conformed. And, we do this by the renewing of our minds. We do this by replacing our thoughts with His thoughts. To a large degree, the spiritual battle is in our minds. *Sha’ul* said: 5 ... *We are*

*taking every thought captive to the obedience of Messiah— 6 ready to punish all disobedience (of the mind), whenever your obedience is complete. (2Corinthians 10:5-6 TLV).* It is in our minds that doubt usually comes in. It is our own minds that question our ability to achieve our goals. It is our minds that most often chokes out what could be a good idea and proclaims it worthless. When we take every thought captive, we replace it with ADONAI's words, words of promise, words of healing and words of faith, words of encouragement from the *Ruach Kodesh*.

*Sha'ul* then tells us that we are many parts of one body, parts which do not all have the same function. He said: *6 We have gifts that differ according to the grace that was given to us— (Romans 12:6a TLV).* He lists the gifts as prophecy, serving, teaching, exhortation, giving, leading and mercy. We all have one or more of these gifts to some degree. *Sha'ul* encourages us to use them to the extent of our abilities for the building up of the body.

Love fulfills the *Torah*: **<17>** *8 Owe no one anything except to love one another, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the Torah. 9 For the commandments—“You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not covet,” and any other commandment—are summed up in this word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” 10 Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fullness of the Torah. (Romans 13:8-10 TLV).* It's the *V'ahafta*, Deuteronomy 6. *V'ahafta* means “and you shall.” Marty Goetz wrote in his song: **<18>** *“V'ahavta l'reyacha kamocha; You shall love your neighbor as yourself! And upon these two commandments stands the whole law. Love your neighbor; Love your G-d; V'ahavta!”* That's the essence of *Torah*. A Pharisee questioned Yeshua: **<19>** *6 “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Torah?” 37 And He said to him, ““You shall love Adonai your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ 40 The entire Torah and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” (Matthew 22:36-40 TLV).*

Those who follow an antinomian theology, a theology which teaches that Law has passed away and has no part with life in Yeshua, can only do so by taking Scripture out of context. In Acts 10, when *Shimon Kefa* had his vision of the sheet coming down with all kinds of unclean animals on it and ADONAI said: “kill and eat *Kefa*,” He was not saying that Peter could now eat snakes, scorpions and ham. Peter understood that and he clearly explained the meaning of his vision to Cornelius and the other Gentiles when he said: **<20>** *28 ... , “You yourselves know that it is not permitted for a Jewish man to associate with a non-Jew or to visit him. Yet God has shown me that I should call no one unholy or unclean.” (Acts 10:28 TLV).* Jews not being permitted to associate with Gentiles was a man-made rule of Judaism. ADONAI hadn't and didn't change His *Torah*. His *kosher* laws are still *kosher* laws. What G-d revealed as clean through the vision of the sheet was the Gentiles, who before this time had no access to ADONAI except through conversion to Judaism. After conversion, they were considered Jews and not Gentiles. But, when ADONAI showed *Shimon Kefa* that the Jew's separation from Gentiles was a man-made doctrine, it opened the door for what we spoke about last *Shabbat* to take place, the blessing of Abraham and that Gentiles could be grafted into Israel. Unless this man-made doctrine was exposed, ADONAI's plan to graft the Gentiles into Israel would not have happened. As it was, it took about seven years after the Holy Spirit was poured out on Jews at *Shavuot* for this to occur. And, that was most likely ADONAI's plan. Those who interpret this vision as repealing the laws of *kashrut*, the *kosher* laws, are doing so to satisfy their bellies, what they want to eat, and to uphold an antinomian theology. At the same time, without realizing it, they are denying the truth revealed through

Peter's vision, that this vision was what opened the door for them into the Commonwealth of Israel through the blessing of Abraham. Their grafting into Israel was announced by the very vision which they reject. One modern version of the Bible even goes so far as to interpret it this way: <21> <sup>15</sup> *The voice spoke to him again, "When God says that something can be used for food, don't say it isn't fit to eat."* (Acts 10:15 CEV).

Through *Kefa's* vision, ADONAI was showing Yeshua's disciples that He wanted the Gentiles to have an opportunity to be a part of what He was doing through the New Covenant. Just how this was to be applied came up again not too long after Peter's vision. It's found in Acts 15 and referred to in many Bibles as "The Jerusalem Council." Antinomian theology erroneously concludes that this council, made up of Yeshua's brother *Ya'akov*, the *nazi*, the leader of the Jerusalem congregation, along with *Shimon Kefa*, *Sha'ul* and other apostles and elders, ruled that Gentiles did not have to keep the *Torah*, the Law. But, it was much more complicated than that. It all came about because some Jews who had trusted in Yeshua and were a part of the party of the Pharisees went down to Antioch and were teaching that the Gentiles coming to faith in Yeshua could not be saved unless they were circumcised "according to the *Torah* of Moses." *1 Now some men coming down from Judea were teaching the brothers, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."* (Acts 15:1 TLV). This raises a question: how is one circumcised according to Moses? As you know and we'll show in a moment that ADONAI gave circumcision through Abraham. But, *Sha'ul* who was also a believing Pharisee, did not agree with them.

With regard to Moses and circumcision, we know several things. We know that ADONAI became angry with Moses because he had not circumcised his sons and his wife saved his life by performing the circumcision herself (Exodus 4:25). That does not seem to be what Acts 15:1 is about. The most likely connection between Moses and circumcision with Acts 15:1 is found in Exodus 12. Verse 44 referring to Passover, says: *44 but every man's servant that is bought for money, after you have circumcised him, may eat it.* (Exodus 12:44 TLV). Verse 48 repeats it: *48 But if an outsider dwells with you, who would keep the Passover for ADONAI, all his males must be circumcised. Then let him draw near and keep it. He will be like one who is native to the land.* (Exodus 12:48 TLV). This is the most likely meaning of "circumcised according to the custom of Moses," particularly since the discussion is about Gentiles coming into the faith. The last sentence, *He will be like one who is native to the land*, tells us that the outsider, the Gentile who has been circumcised in this manner, is now qualified to eat the *Pesach* meal, but that he would also be subject to the Laws which eventually would be given at Mount Sinai and was responsible to follow the *mitzvot* prescribed by ADONAI for Israel. It seems that these Messianic Pharisees believed that it was necessary for Gentiles to convert to Judaism after they had accepted Yeshua. In the 1<sup>st</sup> century what was more simply done at the time of the Exodus now took a much more complicated form.

What does "circumcised" mean? Basically, it is the removal of the foreskin of a male and is known in *Torah* as *B'rit Milah*, the covenant of circumcision. It is an everlasting covenant between ADONAI and Israel, the Jewish people, the covenant which promised *eretz Yisra'el*, the Land of Israel, to the people of Israel forever. It was initially made with Abraham and was to be performed when Jewish males were eight days old. Adult male circumcision was not practiced on Jews except in one unusual case. The second generation Israelite males born in the Wilderness after coming out of Egypt had not been circumcised and ADONAI instructed that it has to be done before Israel could begin their conquest of the Canaanites. That was a long time ago. But, now, in the 1<sup>st</sup> century and even before, a certain number of Gentiles had joined themselves to Israel, become proselytes to Judaism. In order to do this,

a Gentile male had to be circumcised, that is, brought into the covenant of Abraham. After that and other requirements, those Gentiles were then considered to “be Jews.” This was all because in that day being a Jew and being a part of Israel and Judaism meant salvation. A Gentile proselyte had a relationship with ADONAI, the G-d of Israel. If you were a Jew or a proselyte to Judaism, you were considered “saved” in the expectation of that time and had the promise of being a part of “the world to come,” eternal life. All other people, the Gentiles, were outside of ADONAI’s kingdom. They were pagans, worshippers of false gods, most of whom worshipped one or more of the Greek, Roman or other national gods.

*Sha’ul* and *Barnaba* went up to Jerusalem to have this problem resolved. *Sha’ul* was a major part of this situation and even precipitated the meeting because he and Barnabus didn’t agree with the other Messianic Pharisees. This is a continuation of our sessions about *Sha’ul* the Jew and what he believed. He and Barnabus took this question to Jerusalem because it was the operations center of the rapidly expanding ministry of Yeshua’s followers. From Jerusalem, disciples were beginning to be sent out to all parts of the known world. That *Sha’ul* and *Barnaba* went there to have the question resolved showed that they both respected and submitted to the authority of that group of leaders.

As you study this message later, I suggest that you read all of Acts 15. Only the general story will be told today along with some key Scriptures. The Messianic Pharisees posed their question about being circumcised according to Moses first, but then went further: *5 But some belonging to the party of the Pharisees who had believed stood up, saying, “It is necessary to circumcise them and to command them to keep the Torah of Moses.”* (Acts 15:5 TLV). The \$64,000 dollar question is “what is the *Torah* of Moses?” We’ll see that in a moment, but essentially what these Messianic Pharisees believed is that Gentiles who accepted Yeshua had to become Jewish proselytes just as the custom had been for several centuries. *Sha’ul* and *Barnaba* did not agree with them and put the question to the group which they believed had the authority to deal with it, the Apostles and elders. The group began to debate the question: *7 After much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, “Brothers, you know that in the early days God chose from among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the message of the Good News and believe. 8 And God, who knows the heart, testified to them by giving them the Ruach ha-Kodesh—just as He also did for us. 9 He made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts through faith.* (Acts 15:7-9 TLV). Peter had not long before been given the vision of the sheet to show that ADONAI wanted Gentiles to hear the Good News of Yeshua. And, when he went to Cornelius’ house, the *Ruach Kodesh*, the Holy Spirit, fell on the Gentiles just as it had on the Jews on *Shavuot*, the Pentecost which occurred 50 days after Yeshua’ death on the cross. What Peter said was that G-d caused this to happen to Cornelius and the members of his household without circumcision or any formal conversion. They were both saved and filled with the Holy Spirit.

The next verse is the one that most who hold to an antinomian theology choose as the definitive evidence that Gentiles are not to follow *Torah*. *Kefa* asked: *10 Why then do you put God to the test by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples—which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? 11 But instead, we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Yeshua, in the same way as they are.”* (Acts 15:10-11 TLV). Just like the Gentiles, *Kefa* was saved by the grace of Yeshua, but he was already keeping the commandments at that time. The question was, do Gentiles have to be commanded to keep *Torah* in order to be saved. Peter said no. It’s only through grace. But, he also brought up something which he called a yoke that the Jews themselves had had difficulty with for centuries.

What is that yoke? Is it following *Torah*, obeying the Law? We've established in our past messages that *Torah* was something which ADONAI established, not something man-made, something which *Kefa* and *Sha'ul* and the others readily upheld. We saw it in *Sha'ul's* teaching about *Torah* in his letter to the Romans and see it in his offering of sacrifices at the Temple for a Nazirite vow later on in the Book of Acts (Acts 21). We also saw it in Peter's refusal to eat anything unclean when he had the vision of the sheet. *Torah* is indeed of G-d, but not as a requirement for salvation. After trusting Yeshua, following *Torah*, being obedient to ADONAI's commands, is the reasonable service of a grateful member of ADONAI's family. The yoke Peter spoke about is not the "yoke of heaven" which we mentioned earlier. It has nothing to do with the written *Torah*. The disciples loved ADONAI's *Torah* and keeping His commandments was not a burden for them. The Psalmist wrote: *97 O how I love Your Torah! It is my meditation all day. 98 Your mitzvot make me wiser than my enemies—for they are mine forever.* (Psalms 119:97-98 TLV). This was a general theme of many Psalms and Proverbs. The "yoke" was not the *Torah* given by ADONAI. The yoke *Kefa* spoke of is another kind of yoke, a requirement placed on Israel by the Pharisees and not by ADONAI.

The overall question being dealt with by the Jerusalem Council was "should Gentiles who have trusted Yeshua be required to become Jewish proselytes?" That's what it boiled down to. But, there was a part of the conversion requirements to Judaism that was the yoke to which Peter objected. In Yeshua's day, there were two *Torahs* of Moses. The Law of Moses given by ADONAI through Moses was called the *Torah Shebiktav*, meaning written *Torah*. This was the *Torah* that *Kefa* and *Ya'akov* and *Sha'ul* and the others readily followed. The second *torah* was called the *Torah She'b'al Peh*, the *torah* of the mouth, the "oral law." This *torah* was "supposedly" passed down from Moses orally and was commanded to be followed by the Pharisees of Yeshua's day and continues to be followed by the more orthodox in rabbinic Judaism today. The *oral torah* of the 1<sup>st</sup> century was eventually written down (200 CE), becoming known as the *Mishnah*, the foundational part of the *Talmuds*. *Shimon Kefa*, Simon Peter, did not believe it then and we as Messianic Jews and Gentiles, don't believe it today. In fact, we reject any source other than ADONAI's written Word, Genesis to Revelation, as being authoritative for us. We believe in *sola scriptura*, by Scripture alone. The *oral torah* of the Pharisees was the yoke which neither Peter nor the fathers could bear. It contained such things as requiring the ritual washing of hands up to the wrist before partaking of any food. Yeshua condemned this practice in Mark 7. The *oral torah* was a yoke placed by the Pharisees sometime after returning from Babylonian captivity and it continues to be rejected by Messianic Jews today.

It's very difficult to understand how through the many centuries that Israel strayed away from worshipping ADONAI so many times, yet supposedly the *oral torah* was always perfectly preserved! During King Josiah's reign, we are told in 2Kings 22 that the "Book of the *Torah*" was discovered after being lost for many generations and they immediately began to follow it. Are we to believe that the "actual written *Torah*" was lost, but the *oral torah* being passed down by oral means only was being perfectly preserved during this same time? I don't think so. After Israel left the Wilderness and entered the Land of Canaan under Joshua's leadership, Joshua 8 says this: *34 Then afterward he read all the words of the Torah—the blessing and the curse—according to all that is written in the book of the Torah. 35 There was not a word of all that Moses commanded that Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel, including the women and the little ones and the outsiders walking among them.* (Joshua 8:34-35 TLV).

If there were other commandments which Israel needed to know, surely ADONAI would have made reference to them in some way in *Torah*. But there is not a word about any other requirements other than the ones which Joshua read and the written ones which have subsequently been added by later writers of Scripture.

What the Messianic Pharisees were calling for was for new Gentile followers of Yeshua to be made to undergo conversion to Judaism. For males, this meant that they would be circumcised, immersed in water and required to follow both *oral torah* and ADONAI's written *Torah*. The same was required for women except without the circumcision. Through this conversion process, Gentiles would be considered to be Jews. The full council rejected this. They agreed that circumcision and following *oral torah* should not be required. With regard to ADONAI's written *Torah*, they took a different approach.

*Ya'akov*, Yeshua's brother and the leader of the group said: 19 "Therefore, I judge not to trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God— 20 but to write to them to abstain from the contamination of idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what is strangled, and from blood." (Acts 15:19-20 TLV). These new followers of Yeshua were formerly followers of false gods and worshippers in pagan temples. These four things, idols, sexual immorality, eating meat that was strangled and eating blood was the norm in their former type of worship. But, each of these was a violation of *Torah*. ADONAI said "You shall have no other gods before you." (Exodus 20). ADONAI also forbade homosexuality and adultery, both of which were condemned in *Torah*. Prostitution was condemned in Proverbs. Eating meat that was strangled was eating meat that did not have the blood drained from it as required by *Torah* and eating blood was explicitly prohibited by *Torah*. Realizing that some of these new Gentile believers might still be wandering back into the pagan temples, *Ya'akov* ruled that these four prohibitions would keep them straight until they became more grounded in their new faith. Then he said: 21 "For Moses from ancient generations has had in every city those who proclaim him, since he is read in all the synagogues every *Shabbat*." (Acts 15:21). What does this mean? It means that although the new Gentile believers did not know that these things done in paganism were prohibited by *Torah*, that they would come to learn not only those things, but all of *Torah*, by attending synagogue on *Shabbat*. It was a practical, gradual, approach. Moses, a reference to *Torah*, was proclaimed through the *parshiot*, the *Torah* portions, read in every synagogue every *Shabbat*, something which we, ourselves, continue today. The new Gentile believers were not required to become proselytes to Judaism, but were expected to attend synagogue and to learn *Torah*. Attending service on *Shabbat* was ADONAI's command and something that we agree is necessary.

*Sha'ul* and *Barnaba* came to Jerusalem to settle this question and the Apostles and elders agreed with them. What they decided is also what we believe today. Salvation is by faith in Yeshua through ADONAI's grace only. That's it. Repent of your sins and trust in the death of Yeshua as a sacrifice for your sins and you will receive the promise of salvation. Here at *Beit Shalom*, we basically follow the decision that the Apostles and elders made in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. Today, we don't have former pagans who worshipped other gods as they did in the first century, but we do sometimes have those who worship gods of their own making, money, pleasure, power and other things. A person who comes here is encouraged to trust in Yeshua if they don't already and to be immersed if they haven't been. Then, they are encouraged to attend regularly and "hear Moses read," the study of the *Torah* through the weekly *parasha*. There is no requirement for circumcision for Gentiles. While we encourage our attenders to follow *Torah*, we can't make anyone do it. It is each person's decision to make themselves. After coming to faith in Yeshua, how will we walk out our faith? In the

end, we will have to give an account for what we did. Each of us will stand before Yeshua and be judged by Him for what we have done, whether good or bad. (Romans 14:12; 2Corinthians 5:10). What we do today and during our lifetime is vitally important. Yeshua said: “Come to me, you who are heavy laden and I will give you rest.” His yoke is easy and His burden is light. *Shabbat shalom!*