



Parasha Vayelekh

October 1, 2022

Torah: Deuteronomy 31:1-30

Haftarah: Isaiah 55:6-56:8

Sh'lichim: Romans 7:7-12

Our parasha today is Vayelekh, one of the two shortest and the one with very least number of verses. But, it is the most powerful short message. Before we begin with the message, I first need to explain about our haftarah, our reading from the Prophets. Today is traditionally known as Shabbat Shuvah, the Sabbath of Return, because it falls between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur in the Ten Days of Awe. The word "Return" means "return to ADONAI." Hosea 14, Micah 7 and Joel 2 are traditional for this Shabbat. The haftarah reading for this parasha when it does not fall on Shabbat Shuvah is Isaiah 55:6-56:8. I have chosen to use it today because it especially speaks to us as a congregation of Jews and non-Jews during this season. Today, as we discuss Parasha Vayelekh, we will also draw from Isaiah.

Chapter 31 begins *Moshe's* farewell speech to Israel, a combination of a farewell and a pep talk, words to prepare them for what they are about to face when they enter the Land of Canaan, the future *Eretz Yisra'el*, the Land of Israel, for which they have been waiting so long. They faced a very physical battle. The modern battle for *Eretz Yisra'el* which began in 1948 has been both physical and spiritual, even to this day. Even though we are not physically in Israel, we have been a part of the ongoing battle, as we have been an advocate for Israel and focused in prayer for both the nation of Israel and for our brothers and sisters in Israel. The spiritual battle will continue as ADONAI's adjustments in Israel are made in preparation for *Yeshua's* return.

The political battles with regard to the present secular nature of Israel will continue. Currently, there is much political division in Israel with a new election coming up on November 1st. There will be struggles for political rule as long as Israel is a secular nation, and most likely will continue to be so until this prophecy of Zechariah takes place: *10 "Then I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication, when they will look toward Me whom they pierced. They will mourn for him as one mourns for an only son and grieve bitterly for him, as one grieves for a firstborn"* (Zechariah 12:10 TLV). I believe that this will occur before *Yeshua's* return. ADONAI will simultaneously put a spirit of mourning into the heart of every Jew who does not know *Yeshua*. In their hearts, their minds, they will see *Yeshua*, whose pierced, sacrificed body they have rejected and they will repent. They will make *t'shuvah* and return. And, then all Israel will be saved. As *Sha'ul* prophesied, *26, "The Deliverer shall come out of Zion. He shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob. 27 And this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins"* (Romans 11:26b TLV). I believe that it will be a national event, with Jews who do not know *Yeshua* repenting and mourning for *Yeshua*, even as they acknowledge in their hearts that He is *Mashiach*. This event will be with all of Israel just as the *Pesach* in Egypt was with all Israel, at least for those who were obedient to place the lamb's blood upon their doorposts. This event will also in a sense be a "passover, a passing from death to eternal life, for all

Israel, that is, for those who are willing and able to repent. There may be some who cannot or will not repent and thus, will be lost, but “all Israel,” the nation as a whole will be saved, just as they were saved from the Death Angel and Pharaoh.

As a group, ADONAI has punished Israel for their sins numerous times and He has also forgiven them many times. In last week’s *parasha*, ADONAI made this promise to Israel: 5 “ADONAI your God will bring you into the land that your fathers possessed, and you will possess it; and He will do you good and multiply you more than your fathers. 6 Also Adonai your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants—to love Adonai your God with all your heart and with all your soul, in order that you may live” (Deuteronomy 30:5-6 TLV). *Adonai your God will circumcise your heart* is further confirmation of *Sha’ul’s* prophecy. The circumcision of the heart means that one is being declared righteous by ADONAI. It is accomplished by repenting of sin and the acceptance of Yeshua’s sacrificial death as payment for sin. Exactly when this will occur for “all Israel,” we don’t know, but we are right now in the prophetic age of Messiah’s coming.

Dispensationalism teaches that the saved will be raptured, but the unbelieving Jews on the earth will be left behind to be persecuted and killed by the Anti-Christ during the Great Tribulation. But, we don’t believe Dispensationalism. There is no human Anti-Christ coming. As we know, the Great Tribulation occurred in the 1st century in Jerusalem and the Land of Israel in the year 70. At that time, the Roman army caused the deaths of over 1 million Jews and took hundreds of thousands more as slaves. That is a great tribulation, but it was in Israel and not a world-wide future event. Yeshua made it very clear in the context of everything which He said to His disciples that day on the Mount of Olives. He said: 21 “For then there will be great trouble (**Great Tribulation**), such as has not happened since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will!” (Matthew 24:21 TLV). Yeshua is coming soon, for all of us, both the living and the dead, who have trusted in Him and who will trust in Him. That is our great hope; the hope for which we are waiting.

Moses’ words to Israel in our *parasha* are his words to us today: 6 “Chazak! Be courageous! Do not be afraid or tremble before them. For Adonai your God—He is the One who goes with you. He will not fail you or abandon you” (Deuteronomy 31:6 TLV). The TLV translates the first word of this verse as *chazak*, a word which is familiar to us, meaning “be strong.” But, the Hebrew doesn’t say *chazak*. It says: *chizku v’imtsu*, which can also be translated, “be strong and of good courage,” *חִזְקוּ וְיִמְצוּ*. What is the difference between the “Chazak!, Be courageous” of the TLV and the “Be strong and of good courage of the *Mechon Mamre* Hebrew Scriptures? There is very little difference, except that by using *chazak*, the TLV immediately brings to our minds the phrase which we repeat together after each book of the *Torah* is completed: *Chazak, chazak, v’nitchazek!* Be strong, be strong and let us be strengthened! This is something that we will do next *Shabbat* as we complete *Devarim*, the Book of Deuteronomy, with *Parasha Ha’azinu*.

Why do we recite *chazak, chazak, v’nitchazek* after the last *parasha* in each Book of the *Torah*? We do it because it is a Jewish custom of many years and to us, it is a good custom when we consider its possible meaning. According to the Orthodox Union, there are a number of authorities who are of the opinion that “*chazak, chazak, chazak*” is what really should be said upon completion of a book of the *Torah*. This is because the *gematria* of these three words totaled is the same as the total of the name “*Moshe*”. There are many other customs among the various branches of Judaism regarding these words. Some repeat this

phrase after each individual *aliyah* to *Torah* as well as a number of other variations. That's all interesting, but I think that we will stick with what we have been doing.

For us, these words solidify our relationship to *Torah*. In Messianic Judaism, we have many Jews who actually began their spiritual life as Christians and the same is true for most of us who are non-Jews in Messianic Judaism. But, in Messianic Judaism, our relationship to *Torah* is different than in Christianity. This statement is not intended to denigrate Christianity's approach to Scripture, just to note that there is a difference in approaches. Theirs is characterized as anti-nomian, believing that *Torah* is not for today, while ours is nomian, believing that *Torah* is for us today. For us, it is truth, long hidden, but now found. It incorporates for us what *Yochanan* said of *Yeshua*: 14 *"And the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us. We looked upon His glory, the glory of the one and only from the Father, full of grace and truth"* (John 1:14 TLV). *Yeshua* brought the grace gift of salvation to Israel. It is only through His shed blood that Israel or the Nations can receive permanent atonement from our sins. His blood covers our sins and shields us from the wrath of ADONAI toward sin. ADONAI made the rules, we didn't. *Yeshua* also brought us truth, the truth of *Torah*, which He kept perfectly during His life on earth. He did not do away with *Torah*, but correctly interpreted it for us. 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."* (Matthew 5:17 TLV). As a Hebrew idiom, this means "I did not come to incorrectly interpret *Torah*, but to correctly interpret it." And, that is our goal, that we would correctly interpret *Torah* and that we might be faithful *talmidim shel Yeshua*, disciples of *Yeshua*, who are rightly dividing *Torah*. *Sha'ul* told *Timothy*: 15 *"Make every effort to present yourself before God as tried and true, as an unashamed worker cutting a straight path with the word of truth"* 2Timothy 2:15 TLV). The "word of truth" is all Scripture, Genesis to Revelation.

We read this from the first part of our *haftarah* portion today during our *Torah* service: 6 *"Seek Adonai while He may be found, call on Him while He is near. 7 Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous one his thoughts, let him return to Adonai, so He may have compassion on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon"* (Isaiah 55:6-7 TLV). He is always ready to forgive us when we make *t'shuvah*, repent and return to Him. We all sin and we all need forgiveness. It's our human nature. Return to us not only means to repent of our sins, but also to return to obedience to Him. Our *haftarah* also says: 1 *"Thus says Adonai: 'Preserve justice, do righteousness. For My salvation is about to come, and My righteousness to be revealed'"* (Isaiah 56:1 TLV). Although *Isaiah* wrote this two thousand six hundred years ago, for us today it brings a sense of immediacy. It doesn't say "be righteous," but says "do righteousness." We are called to not only be righteous in ADONAI's eyes, but also to do right according to His wishes. His "righteousness" which is about to be revealed is the physical presence of *Yeshua*, Son of David, His only begotten Son, as He returns to earth to establish His Kingdom on earth.

There are many promises in the Five Books of Moses regarding the fulfillment of ADONAI's promise to Abraham regarding *Eretz Yisra'el*, the physical Land of Israel. We find them in *Isaiah*, in *Ezekiel* and in other places. When Messiah *Yeshua* returns, Abraham's descendants who are not already in Israel, are promised a place in the land. Today, many don't want to go there, but in the *olam haba*, the age to come, they will all take up residence there. These next verses in our *haftarah* also speak about that same privilege for some Gentiles. 2 *"Blessed is the one who does this, the son of man who takes hold of it, who keeps from profaning Shabbat, and keeps his hand from doing any evil. 3 Do not let a son of a foreigner who has joined himself to Adonai say, 'Adonai will surely exclude me from His*

people.” Nor let the eunuch say, ‘Behold, I am a dry tree.’” 4 For thus says Adonai, “To the eunuchs who keep My Shabbatot, who choose what pleases Me, and hold fast My covenant: 5 I will give to them in My House and within My walls a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters. I will give them an everlasting name that will not be cut off. 6 Also the foreigners who join themselves to Adonai, to minister to Him, and to love the Name of Adonai, and to be His servants—all who keep from profaning Shabbat, and hold fast to My covenant— 7 these I will bring to My holy mountain, and let them rejoice in My House of Prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be acceptable on My altar. For My House will be called a House of Prayer for all nations.” 8 Adonai Elohim, who gathers the dispersed of Israel, declares, “I will gather still others to him, to those already gathered” (Isaiah 56:2-8 TLV). We don’t know if we will be in that group, but we hope we will. ADONAI knows who will be and will carry out His word regarding this group when Yeshua returns.

But, we also should understand that none of us, Jew or non-Jew, should base our obedience to ADONAI upon the hope of a reward. Our obedience must be based upon our love for the Father and for Yeshua, loving them with all our hearts, all our soul and all our strength, having a desire to serve. *Shema*, meaning “Hear,” not only means hear but also carries with it the implication of “obey.” You see the words *Shema Yisra’el ADONAI Eloheinu ADONAI Echad* above me in Hebrew. “Hear O Israel, ADONAI Our G-d, ADONAI Is One.” You also see *Shema* on the front of the reading table. It is there to remind us that not only do we hear, but we must obey. Our *Beit Shalom* logo incorporates it: “Hear, Trust, Obey.” And, it is the *Torah* to which the *Shema* alludes. And, it continues with the *V’ahavta*: And you shall love the L-rd your G-d with all your heart, with all your mind and with all your strength. We love Him by being obedient to Him.

In our *parasha*, Moses encouraged Israel: *chizku v’imtsu*, “be strong and of good courage.” That message is for us today. Just as the Israelites were about to enter Canaan, so also are we near entering the eternal Kingdom of Yeshua. Much may happen before that day and Yeshua encourages us to be faithful to the truth of ADONAI’s Word as we walk as His disciples.

Those of us whom ADONAI has called to be a part of Messianic Judaism are no better or more special than any other of Yeshua’s followers. But, we have been called to be different. Our calling is to exemplify the love that *Torah* teaches to all those around us, but to also be witnesses to the truth of Scripture without judgment or condemnation of others. *Moshe*’s words, “Be strong and of good courage” are alive for us today, even as we see on the horizon that for which Yeshua’s followers have been waiting for centuries. We don’t know if His coming is tomorrow, next year, or when it may be. But, we do know that, relative to the fulfillment of Messianic prophecy, it is soon. He has called us to be His witnesses to the truth which He taught two thousand years ago, a truth which was so misunderstood at that time by many of His own brothers and sisters in Israel, but also by His early Gentile followers less than one hundred years after He left the earth. *Moshe* said: *Chazak!* Be courageous! His admonition is true for any type of trial which we may face, but it is especially relevant to our understanding the words of Yeshua’s brother *Ya’acov*, when he said: 22 “*But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deluding yourselves*” (James 1:22 TLV). We must not delude ourselves. We must be doers of the *Torah*. ADONAI’s words in our *haftarah* today amplify *Ya’acov*’s words: 10 “*For as the rain and snow come down from heaven, and do not return there without having watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to sow and bread to eat, 11 so My word will be that goes out from My mouth. It will not return to Me in vain, but will accomplish what I intend, and will succeed in what I sent it for.*” (Isaiah 55:10-

11 TLV). ADONAI's word will accomplish that which He sent it for. In the *Olam Haba*, the "world to come," all Israel shall be saved and we who know Yeshua shall all be changed. We will receive eternal bodies when we all achieve the blessed hope of the resurrection of the dead and the rising of the living to meet our Messiah. (1Corinthians 15:51-53). We shall be changed. Encourage each other with these words. *Shabbat shalom!*