



Parasha Ekev

August 16, 2023

Torah: Devarim (Deuteronomy) 7:12-11:25

Haftarah: Yeshayahu (Isaiah) 49:14-51:3

Ketuvim Shlichim: Ya'akov (James) 5:1-12

Shalom Mishpacha. Our *parasha* is *Ekev*, which means “Because.” It begins: 12 “Then it will happen, as a result (*ekev*: because) of your listening to these ordinances, when you keep and do them, that Adonai your God will keep with you the covenant kindness that He swore to your fathers” (Deuteronomy 7). (All Scriptures are from the Tree of Life Version of the Bible unless otherwise indicated). This is a beautiful promise to Israel. Unfortunately, they ultimately did not follow His ordinances, and because of that, we see the individual situations of the Jews of the world today. We feel deep sympathy for their situation today, as we are called to pray in love for their return to ADONAI through His New Covenant, and His promises assure us that it will happen. We also pray for their physical well-being and protection from their enemies. He has promised that He will restore all things through His Son, Yeshua, and we are nearing His time of restoration. He said through Ezekiel: 24 “For I will take you from the nations, gather you out of all the countries and bring you back to your own land. 25 Then I will sprinkle clean water on you and you will be clean from all your uncleanness and from all your idols. 26 Moreover I will give you a new heart. I will put a new spirit within you. I will remove the stony heart from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 I will put My Ruach within you. Then I will cause you to walk in My laws, so you will keep My rulings and do them.” (Ezekiel 36). Six hundred years later, ADONAI confirmed Ezekiel’s words through *Sha’ul*: 25 For I do not want you, brothers and sisters, to be ignorant of this mystery—lest you be wise in your own eyes—that a partial hardening has come upon Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; 26 and in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, “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). That time is very near. Even though ADONAI has placed a partial hardness on the Jews of the world, individuals can come to Yeshua right now by faith. If they quietly listen to their hearts, they will hear the *Ruach Kodesh* calling them. When they then trust in Yeshua, they become firstfruits of salvation and join the rest of His body of believers in praying for the “salvation of all Israel.”

In our *parasha*, as Moses addressed Israel, they were camped on the east side of the Jordan River, getting ready to enter the Land of Canaan. He encouraged them about what was about to happen. 3 “But you will know today that Adonai your God is the One who is crossing over before you as a devouring fire. He will destroy them, and He will bring them down before you, so that you may drive them out and make them perish quickly, as Adonai has promised you.” (Deuteronomy 9). The people of Canaan were meant to die. Moses told Israel that ADONAI had very specific reasons for driving out the people of Canaan. 4 “After Adonai your God has driven them out from before you, do not say in your heart, ‘It is because of my righteousness that Adonai has brought me in to possess this land.’ It is because of the wickedness of these nations that Adonai is driving them out from before you” (Deuteronomy 9). The people of Canaan’s wickedness was the issue. Some people accuse ADONAI of being unjust and unloving because he had Israel kill the inhabitants of Canaan.

Moses explained that it was their wickedness and not Israel's righteousness that caused ADONAI to judge them. As their Creator, He has the right to judge them, just as He did with the people before the flood. Scripture consistently asserts that ADONAI is love. He loved all the people of the Land of Canaan, His creation. However, His righteousness cannot tolerate persistent and unrepentant evil. And ultimately, destruction will be the end of everyone who continues to sin without trust.

The inhabitants of Canaan were aware of the G-d of Israel. Rahab, the woman in Jericho, told the Israelite spies that she knew that G-d had given them the land (Joshua 2:9). The Amorite and Canaanite kings heard how ADONAI had dried up the Jordan River and their hearts melted with fear (Joshua 5:1). The people of Jericho and the kings knew ADONAI by reputation and had heard of all that Israel had done through Him. But there had been no repentance or turning away from their gods in any of these people; except Rahab. ADONAI patiently waited for over 400 years until the people of this land were ready for judgment. He had said to Abraham regarding his descendants: *16 "Then in the fourth generation they will return here—for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete."* (Genesis 15). The people of Canaan were heavily involved in the worship of pagan gods, which included partaking in sexual practices, such as ritual prostitution, incest, and bestiality—sexual intercourse with animals. Infant sacrifice was also a part of their rituals. ADONAI's judgment of them was primarily because of their worship of these false gods and their evil practices, and now, the iniquity of the Amorites was complete. The time had arrived. ADONAI knew they would not repent, and this kind of activity had to be eliminated to prevent it from corrupting Israel. If they were allowed to continue worshipping their gods, the Israelites would be tempted to turn away from ADONAI and follow those false gods. The wickedness of the people of Canaan was too great for ADONAI to allow them to continue living.

Their situation closely resembled that of the great flood that destroyed all the wicked people on Earth, leaving only Noah and his family. ADONAI made the heavens, the earth, and everything within them. Who were these Canaanite people to reject the authority of the Creator of the universe, the one who made them? But the nation of Israel is different. They are a chosen nation, chosen to go in and conquer this land because ADONAI made a promise to Abraham, their ancestor, and gave it to them. Moses told them: *5 It is not by your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart that you are going in to possess their land. Rather, because of the wickedness of these nations, Adonai your God is driving them out from before you, and in order to keep the word Adonai swore to your fathers—to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. 6 So you should understand that it is not because of your righteousness that Adonai your God is giving you this good land to possess—* (Deuteronomy 9). As a people, Israel lacked righteousness. They had not been faithful, and all they were now receiving was because of ADONAI's love for their ancestor, Abraham, a love He transferred to his descendants.

What was it about Noah and Abraham that caused ADONAI to choose them? The *Torah* tells us: *9 ... Noah was a righteous man. He was blameless among his generation. Noah continually walked with God.* (Genesis 6). Is there a difference between being righteous and having righteousness? Remember this question; we will come back to it. Scripture also testifies of the righteousness of two more individuals: *5 In the days of Herod, King of Judah, there was a kohen named Zechariah from the priestly division of Abijah. Elizabeth, his wife, was from the daughters of Aaron. 6 Together they were righteous before Adonai,...* (Luke 1). This Scripture helps us to understand what being righteous before ADONAI means. The second half of verse 6 says that Zechariah and Elizabeth were: *6 ...walking without fault in all His commandments and instructions.* Isn't this what being righteous meant regarding Noah? This must mean that he was obedient to everything that ADONAI told him to do, but

it does not mean that Noah, Zechariah, and Elizabeth were perfect. They weren't perfect, but they were very eager to serve and obey ADONAI. They sinned as all people do, but they also did what was required to make it right when they sinned. They repented.

What about Abraham? Scripture says: *6 Then he believed in Adonai and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.* (Genesis 15). Reading the story of Abraham, it's clear that he sinned multiple times. But the verse we just read reveals more than what the words say. Reading between the lines shows that ADONAI knew Abraham's heart; He could see into his heart, and because of what was in it, He accepted him as righteous. That's how each of us came to be accepted by ADONAI. We welcomed Yeshua into our hearts, trusting that His sacrificial death paid the price for our sins. Yeshua sees our hearts, too! We can't fool Him. If we are not being honest, He knows, and eventually, we will be judged for our deception. So, we must not play games with Yeshua but be completely honest in everything we say to Him. There is a mystery regarding Abraham. The righteousness credited to him was more than mere obedience; it was salvation. *Sha'ul* wrote: *5 So then, the One who gives you the Ruach and works miracles among you—does He do it because of your deeds based on Torah or your hearing based on trust and faithfulness? 6 Just as Abraham “believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,” 7 know then that those who have faith are children of Abraham.* (Genesis 3). “Credited to him as righteousness” means that Abraham received the promise of salvation in the same way that we did: by faith. He saw Yeshua from afar and believed. Yeshua said: *56 “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day; he saw it and was thrilled.”* (John 8). But his righteousness was based on his faith and not on anything he had done up until that point. Yeshua confirmed that Abraham was allowed to see into the future and knew about Him:

Abraham serves as a role model for us in caring for our hearts' spiritual health. We must have hearts that ADONAI recognizes as being open to Him, fully trusting in Him. Moses told Israel: *16 “Circumcise the foreskin of your heart therefore, and do not be stiff-necked anymore.”* (Deuteronomy 10). This statement was made while the First Covenant was in effect, but what does it mean for us now under the New Covenant? *Sha'ul* explained. Moses spoke to the Jews, as did *Sha'ul*, regarding some Jewish members of the congregation in Rome. *17 But if you call yourself Jewish and rely upon the Torah and boast in God 18 and know His will and determine what matters because you are instructed from the Torah— 19 and you are sure that you are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, 20 a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of the immature, having in the Torah the embodiment of knowledge and the truth— 21 you then who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach not to steal, do you steal?* (Romans 2). *Sha'ul* must have had some knowledge of what was going on in the congregation, because he was accusing some of its Jewish members of being hypocrites.

When *Sha'ul* said “Jewish,” he was not speaking “spiritual language” and referring to Gentiles with circumcised hearts; he was speaking to physical Jews, Jews in the flesh. It seems that some of them in Rome were focusing on the *Torah* but not heeding their advice. It also appears from *Sha'ul's* words throughout the Book of Romans that the congregation in Rome included both Jews and Gentiles, and included some believers and some seekers. But in this verse, he was speaking to Jewish men who, because of their emphasis on the *Torah*, were hypocrites at best and unsaved at worst. Referring to their *b'rit milah*, the removal of their foreskin at eight days old, he said: *25 Circumcision is indeed worthwhile if you keep the Torah; but if you break the Torah, your circumcision has become uncircumcision* (Romans 2), indicating to those Jews who were violating the *Torah* that their circumcision of the flesh had become uncircumcision. In ADONAI's eyes, it was as if they had not had a *B'rit Milah*. Our point is that, according to *Sha'ul*, a Jew with an uncircumcised heart is, in reality, “not

a Jew” in ADONAI’s eyes. Circumcision of the flesh is meant to be an outward sign of the condition of the heart. *Sha’ul explained: 28 For one is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision something visible in the flesh. 29 Rather, the Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is of the heart—in Spirit, not in letter. His praise is not from men, but from God. (Romans 2). Sha’ul referred to heart circumcision, the type of surgery that Moses instructed Israel to perform on themselves in Deuteronomy 10. Circumcision involves the removal of flesh. When it is in the heart, it is the regeneration by the Holy Spirit that removes the fleshly or worldly self and leaves a new, renewed heart. But Sha’ul also spoke metaphorically when he said “Jew.” His example involved men, but also applies to Jewish women who do not undergo circumcision of the heart. The “real Jew” in verse 28 is a Jewish man who has been circumcised in the flesh but also has a spiritually circumcised heart, having trusted in Yeshua. Having hearts that are circumcised is the goal for both male and female followers of Yeshua, whether they’re Goyim or Yehudim. Sha’ul wrote: 26 Therefore, if the uncircumcised (a Gentile) keeps the righteous decrees of the Torah, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision? (Romans 2). If Gentile men and women follow the righteous decrees of the Torah, it shows that their hearts have been circumcised. Sha’ul then revealed who the true Jew is. 29 Rather, the Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is of the heart—in Spirit, not in letter. His praise is not from men, but from God. (Romans 2). He was not referring to Gentiles, but ethnic Jews. ADONAI praises Jews who have trusted in Yeshua by faith. This is what we want; this is what ADONAI wants; this is what Yeshua wants; that our love for G-d is so real that we don’t worry about man’s praise, but only G-d’s.*

Regarding Noah, Zechariah, and Elizabeth, if our assessment of their zeal is accurate, then they should undoubtedly serve as examples for our zeal. We don’t want to be like those lukewarm followers of Yeshua in Laodicea. *14 To the angel of Messiah’s community in Laodicea write: “Thus says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Originator of God’s creation: 15 I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. Oh, that you were either cold or hot! 16 So because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spew you out of My mouth.” (Revelation 2). The angel of the congregation is the congregational leader. The Greek *aggelos* also means messenger. Heavenly angels, messengers from ADONAI, are not responsible for the righteousness of our congregations. By messenger, Yeshua referred to the leader of the congregation and put the responsibility squarely on him for the congregation’s failings. As the Congregational Leader here, I am responsible to Yeshua for what happens here. The teachings that I present are prayerfully constructed and led by the Holy Spirit. I follow them and hope you will too. Regarding what Yeshua spoke to the Laodiceans, our best choices are either cold or hot; however, cold is not an option for us, because we are called to be zealous. Yeshua clearly indicated that Laodicea was a congregation that did not follow His example. This doesn’t mean there weren’t some devoted followers of Yeshua there, but that the congregation overall was spiritually uncommitted. Yeshua told his disciples: 24 ..., “If anyone wants to follow after Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me. 25 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. (Matthew 16). Our cross is our commitment to serve Him, and as His disciples, we must dedicate our lives to serving Him. The Laodiceans weren’t doing this, and the deeds of the true believer will reveal them to be “hot” and not “lukewarm.” A life transformed through a real encounter with Yeshua should not cool with time. It must continue to be “hot” throughout the believer’s life. We are filled with the Holy Spirit early in our walk, but many of us begin to cool off, and some even reach a state of being lukewarm. Someone said this about being filled with the Spirit: “We leak.” If the passion we once had has faded, we must ask for a “refill” and have our spirits renewed so that we will strive to please ADONAI in all we do. We please Him in many ways, but with regard to “being*

righteous,” we please Him by being obedient to His commandments, emulating Zechariah and Elizabeth. Luke said about them that they were ...*walking without fault in all His commandments and instructions*. That’s what we must be doing. To be clear, there is no salvation in keeping commandments. But after we are saved by grace through faith, we are expected to be obedient.

Sha’ul told the Ephesians: 15 So pay close attention to how you walk—not as unwise people but as wise. 16 Make the most of your time because the days are evil. 17 For this reason do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is. (Ephesians 5). Each of us would be wise to evaluate how we use our time in serving Yeshua. Are we focusing more on doing what makes us happy than on serving Him? *Sha’ul* admonishes us to: *understand what the Lord’s will is*. Yeshua has commanded us to be His wise servants. He said: *40 “You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you don’t expect.”* (Luke 12). We should strive for what He said next to be His statement about us. *43 “Blessed is that servant whose master finds him so doing when he comes. 44 Truly I tell you, his master will put him in charge of all his possessions.”* (Luke 12).

Yeshua’s brother *Ya’acov*, who was the leader of the Jerusalem congregation, encourages us: *7 So be patient, brothers and sisters, until the coming of the Lord.* (James 5). Jacob was faithful and died a martyr’s death. He was thrown down from the top of the Temple Mount, but it didn’t kill him, and he was stoned as he lay on the ground, his death finally caused by having his brains beaten out with a club. That’s graphic, but *Ya’acov* became faithful once he truly realized that his brother was the Messiah of Israel. We need to be patient, but we also have to keep persevering in following Yeshua. The time of His return is near. With hearts like Abraham’s and zeal like Zechariah’s and Elizabeth’s, we persevere. Is there a difference between being righteous and righteousness? The dictionary says: “Being righteous” refers to the action of living a morally upright life, while “righteousness” is the quality or state of being righteous. Both are good and necessary, but there’s a slight difference. As I interpret it, being in a “state of righteousness” means for us to be saved, having trusted Yeshua. But being “righteous” is something that can happen after we are saved; being zealously faithful to continue to observe all ADONAI’s commandments that are active for us today without the Temple and Levitical priesthood.

Yeshua said: *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). In first-century Judaism, the yoke referred to “the yoke of the *Torah*,” the commitment to study and follow the *Torah*. That’s what Yeshua meant when He said: “Take my yoke upon you.” It’s no different for Yeshua’s followers of the New Covenant today who discern and understand His meaning. What He has asked us to do can easily be done in the power of the Holy Spirit. Just before Yeshua ascended to His Father, He told His disciples: *8 “But you will receive power when the Ruach ha-Kodesh has come upon you; and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and through all Judah, and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”* (Acts 1). We have that power, but we don’t always realize it. Let’s use the power Yeshua has given us to walk as His faithful disciples and to seek His kingdom. He said: *33 “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”* (Matthew 6). When He said “these things,” Yeshua referred to this: *25 “So I say to you, do not worry about your life—what you will eat or drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Isn’t life more than food and the body more than clothing?”* (Matthew 6). If we seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, He will supply our physical needs.

Most of us at *Beit Shalom* are praying every day for revival. What is revival? The answer depends upon your perspective and your vision. We here have been called to

Messianic Judaism, but not everyone who is called understands the vision. The MJAA's beloved Rabbi Robert Solomon, of blessed memory, who has spoken here at *Beit Shalom*, frequently spoke of vision. He emphatically said, Viz-zhawn! I can hear him today. It's singular, not visions, plural. While ADONAI's vision includes something for every person He created, the vision He gave to the Jews whom He led to establish Messianic Judaism in the 1960s was "for the salvation of Israel," and it included the restoration of a first-century understanding of the *Torah*. And it hasn't changed.

Revival in the Church occurs when people who have strayed return to ADONAI, and many unsaved individuals also come to salvation, trusting in Jesus, and it's happening all over right now. We love that it's happening in the Church and continue to pray for more revival. If an unsaved person comes to us, of course, we want to lead him to Yeshua. However, it's a fact that the majority of those ADONAI sends to MJ are already saved. But what is revival in Messianic Judaism? ADONAI is doing it! It's what is happening right here. You are in revival. The song "Days of Elijah" says: "And these are the days of Your servant Moses, righteousness being restored..." (Judy Jacobs, 2001). Moses said: 11 "*For this mitzvah that I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you, nor is it far off.*" (Deuteronomy 30). That's what's happening in Messianic Judaism, not just here, but everywhere. When we emulate Zechariah and Elizabeth, walking without fault in all ADONAI's commandments and instructions, righteousness is being restored, and we are in revival. That's what revival is in Messianic Judaism. But we also desperately need revival in the Church now, as ADONAI has very clearly shown us in His Word, and we pray for a continued outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Church and for an anointing of the people Jesus has called into service there. I spoke with a pastor friend yesterday, and he told me that he is baptizing people every week. It's happening! But right now, getting Gentiles saved is not our calling; it's the Church's calling. Even though our current calling is to Israel, the Jews of the world, we might one day see Gentiles coming to Messianic Judaism to be saved. As the saying goes, "You can't put G-d in a box," and He will use us in whatever manner He chooses.

Vision and calling are essential. I pray that each person here will have a clear vision of where Yeshua has called them. Some are called to the Church, and some are called to Messianic Judaism. But I believe that in the ultimate end, Yeshua will merge the two groups, and we will serve Him according to His instructions in that future time. But for those called to Messianic Judaism now, being a member of Yeshua's kingdom means that we must seek His righteousness. We understand this to mean that we must be obedient to the commands ADONAI spoke of in Jeremiah 31:32 and all other commands given by Yeshua. Through our faithful obedience to these, Yeshua will lead us into all types of service He desires us to perform for Him. We will still be in prayer and ministering to those in need. He has called us to be righteous; may we be faithful in that calling as we wait upon Him! *Shabbat shalom!*