



Parasha Ki Tavo

September 13, 2025

Torah: Deuteronomy 26:1-29:8

Haftarah: Isaiah 60:1-22

Ketuvim Shlichim: Matthew 5:17-24; 38-48

Shabbat shalom Mishpacha! Our *parasha* this week is *Ki Tavo*, which means “when you come in,” referring to entering Canaan, the Land of Promise. Its first verses discuss offering the first fruits of the land after Israel enters it. However, it would be a long process because it would take years for them to conquer the land and defeat its inhabitants. A second theme was reciting blessings on Mount Gerizim and curses on Mount Ebal. History has shown us that, as He promised, ADONAI ultimately brought these curses upon Israel for their idolatry through increasing calamities, ending with the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem, and Israel’s captivity in Babylon. Two thousand five hundred years later, we are approaching the time of ADONAI’s final blessing upon His Jewish people. Isaiah wrote: 9 “*For this is like the waters of Noah to Me: for as I swore that the waters of Noah should no more cover the earth, so I have sworn that I will not be angry with you, nor will I rebuke you.* 10 *Though the mountains depart and the hills be shaken, My love will not depart from you, nor will My covenant of peace be shaken, says Adonai who has compassion on you.* (Isaiah 54:9-10 TLV). Isaiah wrote this while Israel was in Babylon. ADONAI said that the curses have passed, and we believe that His salvation is soon to come upon Israel.

This is the third *Shabbat* of *Elul*, and we continue to reflect on ourselves by examining our hearts. When we look closely at *Parasha Ki Tavo*, we find that it contains individual commands that reinforce the message of examining our hearts. One of these is “catching and returning a brother’s straying ox.” This *mitzvah* teaches righteous action, a concern for our brother, something we find remarkably lacking in many of our United States citizens today. Several days ago, a young woman refugee from Ukraine was murdered, and those who witnessed it just sat there, turning away or hiding their faces while she bled to death on the floor of the subway car. This week, some people burst into applause and others into laughter when they heard Charlie Kirk had been murdered. These are not the actions of circumcised hearts. Our country is in a serious spiritual state. We continue praying for revival and that these people’s hearts will be changed. But the only heart we can change is our own, and that’s our focus today.

Our inward reflection during *Elul* centers on righteousness, our righteousness. What does it really mean to be righteous? Is a person who believes in Yeshua usually righteous? The answer would be yes or no because many followers of Yeshua harbor unconfessed sin and therefore are sinners. Is a sinner righteous? The answer is no; a sinner is not righteous. It’s a matter of the heart. A person with a circumcised heart is turned toward ADONAI, but, as humans, we continue to sin. Everyone sins, but a person with a circumcised heart aims to eliminate sin and repents often, truly remorseful for their wrongdoings. As King Solomon was dedicating the Temple, he prayed: 39 *..then may you hear from heaven, Your dwelling place, forgive and act, and give to each man according to all his ways, as You know his heart*

to be. For You alone know the hearts of all the children of men. (1 Kings 8:39 TLV). ADONAI knows our hearts and is not fooled by those who make pretenses.

What should our attitude toward following ADONAI be? It must be what Moses told us: 16 *“Circumcise the foreskin of your heart therefore, and do not be stiff-necked anymore.”* (Deuteronomy 10:16 TLV). Moses said, “You do it, circumcise your own hearts.” It’s a step we must take. We start the process of circumcising our hearts by genuinely feeling sorry, then confessing our sins, making *teshuvah*, repenting, and turning away from our wrongdoings. But from this point forward, we can no longer do it alone. We must have ADONAI’s help. When we trust in Yeshua, His *Ruach HaKodesh*, His Holy Spirit, enters our spirits and gives us encouragement and support to live a holy life. We who trust in Yeshua are blessed to have the Holy Spirit living in us, guiding, motivating, and continually strengthening us on our daily path. The Holy Spirit not only reminds us of our purpose but also empowers us to live according to the teachings of Yeshua. Through His Spirit, we receive both support and endurance as we strive to live faithfully before ADONAI.

But unfortunately, having the Holy Spirit living within us is not a guarantee of righteousness. That’s because a person filled with the Holy Spirit can and does sin and can also retain unconfessed sin. What would this person be called? He would be called “a sinner.” We all are, but we don’t have to remain that way. The Holy Spirit encourages us to repent, but the individual controls their own heart. Our goal is to have a contrite heart and regularly confess our sins. Would a person with a remorseful heart who regularly confesses their sins be considered righteous? This is a question we must examine further. According to theologians, the term for the act of declaring or making someone righteous in G-d’s sight is justification. *Sha’ul* wrote: 21 *But now God’s righteousness apart from the Torah has been revealed, to which the Torah and the Prophets bear witness— 22 namely, the righteousness of God through putting trust in Messiah Yeshua, to all who keep on trusting. For there is no distinction, 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.* (Romans 3:21-23 TLV). We completely agree. G-d’s righteousness cannot be obtained by obeying the *Torah*, an act which does not impute any righteousness. It is received by faith through trusting in Yeshua. However, not everyone who says “Yes, L-rd” to Yeshua has truly trusted, but only ADONAI knows who they are. However, if we have sincerely trusted in Yeshua, ADONAI has declared us righteous. And at that moment, we are. We are a new creation through Messiah Yeshua, and we continue to be in that relationship with Him if we continue in faith. But after being made righteous by our faith, do we continue to be righteous? We can, but most likely don’t. *Sha’ul* has written: “all who keep on trusting.” Consider a hypothetical case: If one who has trusted in Yeshua has unforgiven sin against his brother, is he righteous? We would say no. He has not continued in trust, faith. So, how can he get back to a condition of righteousness? It is by *teshuvah*, repenting of his sin and forgiving his brother.

Now, let’s look at another theological term, justification. According to theologians, it includes two main aspects. The first is salvation, which is the initial act of trusting in Yeshua, where a believer is declared righteous by G-d. The second aspect is a lifelong, progressive process of becoming holy and more like Yeshua. Theologians say that the Holy Spirit enables this transformation but “requires the believer’s cooperation through obedience and faithfulness to G-d’s Word, guiding them from sinfulness toward righteousness and holiness.” We agree. The Holy Spirit encourages us, but it is our circumcised heart that must cooperate to be obedient to ADONAI’s Word.

Here is where followers of Yeshua in Messianic Judaism differ from His other followers. We believe that ADONAI's commandments throughout the entire Bible define "righteousness and holiness," what we might call "right living." When we follow the commands that Yeshua has said will never pass away until heaven and earth pass away, we are being made righteous (Matthew 5:17-18). Those who believe the Law has been done away with have that privilege. We are not judging them but teaching ourselves. Becoming more like Yeshua is a process that involves both obedience and repentance, a journey of striving to achieve higher levels. Yochanan wrote: *5 But whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God is truly made perfect. We know that we are in Him by this— 6 whoever claims to abide in Him must walk just as He walked.* (1 John 2:5-6 TLV). Walking as He walked means being obedient to what He was obedient. We are called to become more like Yeshua, but it doesn't happen overnight. As Sha'ul said, "Righteousness comes to those who keep on trusting" (Romans 3:22b). "Keeping on trusting" describes the Hebrew word אמונה *emunah*, which means faith and belief, but also includes much more, such as faithfulness, loyalty, trust, steadfastness, and reliability—an active commitment to keeping one's promises. *Emunah* signifies a profound and active trust in ADONAI, rather than a mere passive acceptance of theological beliefs, and it embodies a persistent and unwavering relationship with Yeshua. It is a loyalty shown through our actions, a commitment to the covenant ADONAI has made with us. *Emunah* is both the faith and the faithfulness of those who, as Sha'ul said, "keep on trusting."

In Jewish thought, there is a Hebrew term that describes someone who has achieved a certain level in the process of what we call sanctification. This person is called a צדיק *Tzadik*, a righteous and saintly person. *Tzadik* comes from the Hebrew root *tzedek*, meaning "justice" or "righteousness," and describes a person righteous in ADONAI's eyes. From that, we get the word צדקה *tzedakah*, a word that summarizes justice and righteousness. How we act toward our neighbor and our brother and sister is the primary meaning of *tzedakah*. But we usually think of *tzedakah* as giving money, specifically giving to the poor, as it was understood in ancient Israel. That continues to be an essential usage of the word, but Yeshua has also shown us another aspect of the word. He has called each of us to be *tzadikim*, righteous ones. Yeshua spoke about the *Torah* and Prophets not passing away until heaven and earth pass away (Matthew 5:17-18) and also said that a person who broke the least of these commandments would be considered least in the Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 5:19). Then He said: *20 "For I tell you that unless your righteousness exceeds that of the Pharisees and Torah scholars, you shall never enter the kingdom of heaven!"* (Matthew 5:20 TLV). Our *tzedakah*, our righteousness, must exceed that of the Pharisees and *Torah* scholars. In saying this, Yeshua essentially said, "These people are not a part of the Kingdom of G-d." This means that a lack of righteousness can keep us out of the Kingdom of G-d. I don't know who lacks it, and I am not judging anyone. Yeshua is our judge, and this is something we must take very seriously!

According to most of the teachings Yeshua gave us, a major part of how righteousness is determined comes from our relationships with others. It's determined through our horizontal relationships. Of course, our first calling is to love ADONAI our G-d with all our heart, mind, and strength. As Yeshua told us, that is the most important commandment (Matthew 22:37-38, Mark 12:30, and Luke 10:27a). That first love is directed toward the Father and Yeshua, a vertical love. But if we look closely, we notice that most of Yeshua's teachings are directed horizontally, toward our fellow man, our neighbor. We are commanded to love him with a love equal to the love we have for ourselves (Matthew 22:39, Mark 12:31, Luke 10:27b). And when we practice horizontal love, we also strengthen our vertical

relationship with Yeshua and our Father. However, loving our fellow man is much harder than loving ADONAI because people aren't always kind, and our own nature struggles to respond to those who are unkind to us. But much of Yeshua's teaching focuses on loving them, even when they are not kind to us or might even want to kill us. We are not told to love them "if" they are nice to us. The fully committed follower of Yeshua understands that we must love them no matter what. Yeshua said: *44 But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. 46 For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Even the tax collectors do the same, don't they? 47 And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than anyone else? Even the pagans do that, don't they? 48 Therefore be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect*" (Matthew 5:44-47 TLV). It's not easy to love those who curse us. It's not even easy to love those who remain angry at us over something they think we've done to them, no matter how minor.

But we have been commanded to be perfect in our love. Yeshua didn't say "do your best to love them." He said, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." This is a significant theme of the month of *Elul*: how to live with our fellow man with a G-d-like love. Yeshua told us, "Therefore be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect." We know that we can't be perfect, but we are to strive to be perfect in ADONAI's eyes. But if we're not in a righteous relationship with our fellow man, our neighbor, we're more than likely not in a right relationship with ADONAI. Each of us needs to examine our hearts to determine if we are truly where we think we are in relation to both our vertical and horizontal relationships.

Sha'ul told us that "the Law" is never effective for salvation: *20 For no human, on the basis of Torah observance, will be set right in His sight—for through the Torah comes awareness of sin.* (Romans 3:20). He also wrote: *11 It is clear that no one is set right before God by Torah, for "the righteous shall live by emunah."* (Galatians 3:11). The Prophet Habakkuk wrote: *4 "Look at the proud: he is inwardly not upright; But the righteous will attain life through trusting faithfulness."* (Habakkuk 2:4 CJB). The Complete Jewish Bible clarifies *emunah* for us by translating *b'emunah* as "by trusting faithfulness." The Hebrew בְּאֵמוּנָה *b'emunah* means "by faith," but also "by faithfulness." It is like Doris Day's song "Love and Marriage." "They go together like a horse and carriage; you can't have one without the other." We can exhibit faith for a moment, but it is useless if it does not continue as faithfulness. They go together.

Although obedience to the Law does not provide salvation, we believe it is effective for "right living before G-d," a concept that can also be expressed through the term sanctification. *Sha'ul* wrote: *12 So then, the Torah is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.* (Romans 7:12 TLV). 1. "Holy" means that by obeying it, we are set apart unto G-d. 2. "Righteous" means that when we obey "the commandment(s)," ADONAI considers us righteous. 3. "Good" means "that which is morally right; righteousness. These three taken together mean that when we obey ADONAI's *Torah*, we are walking in righteousness and moving toward the goal of becoming more like our Master. We will never achieve it in this life, but we are commanded to keep striving for it. During His Sermon on the Mount, speaking about our physical needs, Yeshua said: *33 "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."* (Matthew 6:33 TLV). We ask, "Father, give us our bread for today," but He instructs us: "Seek first My kingdom and My righteousness, and then you shall have it."

We have sought Yeshua's kingdom, trusted in Him, and are now living in His spiritual kingdom, which exists both in heaven and on earth, awaiting the physical coming of His Kingdom to Earth. His kingdom is the rule of ADONAI over His creation, which He established through Messiah Yeshua, His Son. It is the present spiritual reality for us who have trusted in Yeshua. ADONAI rules in our hearts in the present time, but His kingdom is also preordained to appear in the future as an earthly kingdom. In it, when Yeshua returns to earth, we who have trusted in Him will receive transformed bodies, allowing us to rule and reign with Him in the timelessness of eternity. Until that time comes, we must keep striving to pursue His righteousness by doing our best to follow His commands. We reiterate our position to ensure no one misunderstands. "Pursuing His righteousness" does not mean that we either believe in or teach a works-based salvation. We believe that ADONAI's grace saves us through our faith in Yeshua, and nothing else is required, because His sacrifice of His human body paid the price for our sins and our eternal salvation. As Messianic believers in Yeshua, we understand that the purpose of the *Torah* is not to offer a path to salvation, but to serve as a way of life for those who are already redeemed. This way of life, the obedience of the *Torah* guided by the Holy Spirit, is the means of our process of sanctification.

While we know that salvation is through ADONAI's grace alone by faith in Yeshua, many of His followers don't realize that salvation is just the starting point—the beginning of our relationship with Him. Yeshua's bloody sacrifice on the cross cut the blood covenant for us and by our trust in Him, made us members of the household of G-d and citizens of the commonwealth of Israel. As Yeshua's Messianic followers, we recognize that these words of His do not excuse us from obeying His commands. 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). Rather than being exempt from following the commands that are still in effect today, we are told that not a single "jot or tittle," which includes even the tiniest letter, the *yod*, and the *kotz*, a decorative mark on a letter, will disappear from the *Torah* or the Prophets before heaven and earth come to an end. This clarifies that these commands are the commands in the *Torah* which ADONAI has written on our hearts (Jeremiah 31:31). Yeshua is the living Word spoken of by John: 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). "Word" is translated from the Greek, "*logos*," which theologians understand as being "the Divine Word," the Word of G-d." As the Divine Word, Yeshua has His Father's authority to speak about the *Torah*. By stating that the *Torah* and the Prophets have not been abolished, Yeshua also clarifies that this is precisely what He refers to when He mentions "jot and tittle," because there are no "jots and tittles" in the Greek alphabet. When we talk about obeying Yeshua's commands, we don't see them as burdensome. Serving our Messiah is a joy to us. Our relationship with Him is not based on serving out of fear, but on joyful service out of love.

The month of *Elul* provides a chance to reflect more deeply on our relationship with Yeshua and what it should be, as well as our relationship with other people. The rabbis teach that The Song of Solomon is an allegory for the loving, covenantal relationship between God and Israel. In Hebrew, it is called *Shir HaShirim* or "Song of Songs," and is traditionally read at Passover. Traditional Judaism states that "at Passover our romance with ADONAI began." They are so very close to the truth, and one day soon, all Israel will understand that it was their romance with Yeshua that began at Passover when He died as their Passover sacrifice. According to the rabbis, *Shir HaShirim* is an allegory of the love affair between G-d

and His people. And that's the way we understand it. As followers of Yeshua, we recognize it as the love affair between us and our Messiah. Our love is described in the anacronym for the month of "*Elul*," The first letters of the first four words of Song of Songs 6:3 are א *alef*, ל *lamed*, ו *vav*, and ל *lamed*, which spell אלוּל *Elul*. The first four words are: אני לדודי ודודי לי, *ani l'dodi v'dodi li*, "I am my beloved's and He is mine." The Tree of Life Bible expresses the first three verses of chapter 6 in this way. In verse 1, someone asks: *1 Where has your lover gone, most beautiful among women? Where has your lover turned, so we may seek him with you?* The female responds: *2 My lover went down to his garden, to the beds of balsam to graze his flocks in the gardens and to gather lilies. 3 I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine. He browses among the lilies.* We can interpret these verses as an allegory for our love relationship with Yeshua, our bridegroom, and our beloved. The female speaking is us, the bride of the Messiah. In our allegory, we compare our love for Yeshua to the mature and devoted love of a husband and wife.

In ADONAI's relationship with Israel through His First Covenant, He used a similar metaphor. Through Isaiah, He said: 5 "*For your Maker is your husband —Adonai-Tzva'ot is His Name*"— (Isaiah 54:5a TLV). Through Jeremiah, He said: 14 "*Return, O backsliding children,*" declares Adonai. "*For I am your Husband. I will choose you—one from a city and two from a clan— and will bring you to Zion.*" (Jeremiah 3:14 TLV). ADONAI used an example we understand—the covenantal relationship of marriage—to describe the relationship He desires with us. But Israel broke that first relationship. Through Jeremiah, He said: 31 ... "*For they broke My covenant, though I was a husband to them.*" It is a declaration of Adonai. (Jeremiah 31:31b TLV). They didn't obey Him, and now He has established a New Covenant with Israel, one in which He inscribes His *Torah* on the hearts of those in a covenant relationship with Him through Yeshua.

In our spiritual walk with ADONAI, we have the opportunity to obey His commands and not break His covenant. This is a new day with a New Covenant, and we are called to be obedient. Our obedience is rooted in our love. Yeshua's answer to a *Torah* scholar's question about the "commandment that is first of all" was: 29 ..., "*The first is, 'Shema Yisrael, Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai echad.'*" "*Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One.*" 30 *And you shall love Adonai your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.*" (Mark 12:29-30 TLV). Yeshua said: 15 "*If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.*" (John 14:15 TLV). If we love Him, we will keep His commandments. His second greatest commandment is to love our neighbor as ourselves. These commands define both our vertical and horizontal relationships, which we must scrupulously maintain. When we obey His *mitzvot*, we become more sanctified, more like our Messiah Yeshua. In our humility, no one of us would ever say, "I am righteous," but that is what we are called to be, *tzadikim*, righteous ones. Father, may each of us attain that goal! Seek first the Kingdom of G-d, desiring to be His righteous one, and He will add everything else we need. *Shabbat shalom!*