Parasha *Chayei Sarah* November 7, 2026

Torah: Genesis 23:1-25:18
Haftarah: 1 Kings 1:1-31
Ketuvim Shlichim: Matthew 8:19-22; 27:3-10; Luke 9:57-62

Messianic Judaism 13

Shabbat shalom, Mishpacha! We met *Sha'ul* around 33 CE, just a few years after Yeshua died on the cross. He was a young man, possibly in his mid-twenties, a zealous Pharisee, happy to be the coat-bearer for those stoning Stephen. About two years later, in 35 CE, he had his life-changing encounter with Yeshua on the Damascus road and redirected his zeal to another cause, one opposite to where he had begun. After that, he taught in Antioch and the surrounding area for roughly the next ten years. Then, in 48 CE, he went on the first of three evangelistic trips to Gentile lands. Around 50 CE, he returned to Jerusalem to help settle the question of how to treat new Gentile followers of Yeshua at the Jerusalem Council described in Acts 15. Around 51 CE, he began his second missionary journey, which lasted about three years. Almost immediately after returning, in 54 CE, he began his third journey, which lasted about four years. After he returned to Jerusalem for the last time, he was arrested around 58 CE and sent to Caesarea. Imprisoned there for about 1 1/2 years, he was sent to Rome around 60 CE and arrived in 61. The Book of Acts ends with him in Rome: *30 Paul remained two whole years in his own rented quarters and continued to welcome all who came to him— 31 proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Yeshua the Messiah with all boldness and without hindrance*. (Acts 28:30-31 TLV). *Sha'ul*'s story in Scripture ends around the year 63 CE, and reliable information becomes scarce. Roman history indicates he was acquitted in Rome and released around 63 CE, after which he traveled to Spain, Asia, Macedonia, and Ephesus. Around 67 CE, he was arrested in Nicopolis, a Roman city in modern Greece, and taken to Rome, where Emperor Nero executed him around 68 CE. Whether this final part of *Sha'ul*'s history is true or not, it remains likely that he was executed in Rome. From the age of about 25, when we first met him around 33 CE, he lived a full life of service to Yeshua, as recorded in Scripture, until about 63 CE, about 30 years. He would have been about 55 years old when Acts ended. Whether he lived another five years before being executed is unknown, but if true, he would have died at about age 60, having lived a remarkable life of service to Yeshua.

Today, we continue our study of Sha'ul's writings, trying to understand the difficult passages.. He was not a Christian in the sense of Christianity today, but was a very faithful Messianic Jew. What is a Messianic Jew? In *Sha'ul*'s case, he was faithful in his *Torah* observance. Last session, we showed this clearly using Romans chapters 1-3 and his own confession. Besides being called to minister to the Gentiles, *Sha'ul* identified with them. In 1 Corinthians 9:19-23, he described how he made himself a slave to all to win more of them. To the Jew, he identified as a Jew; to those under *Torah*, he became like one under *Torah*, even though he said that he, himself, was not under *Torah*. This is what was explained last

session. Being under *Torah* meant that some Jews of that day believed that, along with being a part of the Jewish people, keeping *Torah* was their means of salvation. As a follower of Yeshua, *Sha'ul* recognized the importance of following the *Torah*, but not that it could save you. He identified with those outside the *Torah*, the Gentiles, and with those described as "the weak," the *Torah*-observing followers of Yeshua who could not bring themselves to eat kosher meat that had been offered to idols. He taught that there was nothing wrong with eating it, except when it caused your brother to stumble. He concluded: *22 … "I have become all things to all men, so that by all means possible I might save some*." (1 Corinthians 9:22b TLV).

This does not mean he did what these others did; far from it. He identified with them so he could bring them to salvation through Yeshua. Then, after salvation, the teaching came. In Athens, he identified with the Greeks, saying: *22 ….. "Men of Athens, I see that in all ways you are very religious. 23 For while I was passing through and observing the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: 'To an Unknown God.' Therefore, what you worship without knowing, this I proclaim to you*." (Acts 17:22b-23 TLV). Then he proclaimed the Gospel to them. Some scoffed, but a few met with him later to learn more.

Romans chapter 7 is another difficult chapter to understand. *Sha'ul* begins: *1 Or do you not know, brothers and sisters (for I speak to those who know law), that the law is master over a person as long as he lives*? (Romans 7:1 TLV). *Sha'ul* said this to those who knew and followed the law, the *Torah*. Among Yeshua's followers today, we here at *Beit Shalom* must certainly know the law. *Sha'ul* goes on to give the example of a married woman. If she has relations with another man, the *Torah* condemns her as an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning him and is free to marry again: *3 …. But if her husband dies, she is free from the law—so she is not an adulteress, though she is joined to another man*. (Romans 7:3b TLV). She is not an adulteress because her former husband's death frees her from the law, and she is now married to another man. Some mistakenly emphasize "the law" in this verse, believing it means "all of the law." But in *Sha'ul*'s example, the woman is free only from the law that would make her an adulteress if her husband were living. The *Torah* allows her to marry after her husband dies, but she will still be a violator of the law as an adulteress if she engages in sex outside her new marriage. The next verse explains what *Sha'ul* was getting at: *4 Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you also were made dead to the Torah* **(for salvation)** *through the body of Messiah, so that you might be joined to another* **(married to Yeshua)***—the One who was raised from the dead—in order that we might bear fruit for God*. (Romans 7:4 TLV). The woman is not completely free from the law; rather, this means that the law is not for salvation. *Sha'ul* was making a *midrash*, a method of Hebraic interpretation. His point is that we are delivered from the *Torah*'s "condemnation" of keeping it, because we are not keeping it for salvation, that is, to be justified before ADONAI. The death he refers to alludes to Yeshua's death, which freed us from the condemnation that comes from trying to follow the Law outside of faith. It's all right to try to follow the law after you have come to faith. In fact, you should! Even after we have trusted in Yeshua, the law still has a purpose. If we violate it, we are condemned as sinners. *Yochanan*, John, said: *4 Everyone practicing sin also practices lawlessness—indeed, sin is lawlessness*. (1 John 3:4 TLV). The Complete Jewish Bible makes it even clearer. ***4*** *Everyone who keeps sinning is violating Torah — indeed, sin is violation of Torah*. (1 John 3:4 CJB).

Some argue that this is too complicated for the average follower of Yeshua to grasp. But the people to whom the different letters of the *Ketuvim Shlichim*, the Writings of the Apostles, were addressed had no formal education, not even what we would consider high

school level today. Some who were Jewish may have had some education within the synagogue and some training in Hebrew. But don't forget that although these letters were written in Greek, the language of the Gentile world, the underlying language and thought of the *Shlichim* were Hebrew. What about the Gentiles? Most of them were former idol worshippers, and who knows what their educational level was. How did they understand what *Sha'ul* and the other letter writers were writing about? They grasped it through study. They had to want it. What is it? It is truth. And the truth which *Sha'ul* wrote was difficult to understand. Last *Shabbat*, we quoted *Shimon Kefa*, Peter, as he spoke about Paul being hard to understand (2 Peter 3:15-16). His most serious point is in his last statement: *16 ... Some things in them are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist (as they also do with the rest of the Scriptures)—to their own destruction.* (2 Peter 3:16b TLV). *Sha'ul*'s words are being twisted today. If his words were difficult for those living in that culture, how much more difficult are they for the follower of Jesus today? *Sha'ul* is very difficult to understand. He trained at the feet of the Pharisee *Gamli'el*, the grandson of *Hill'el*, and was the equivalent of a PhD in *Torah,* communicating to those who were comparatively grammar schoolers. Then how hard is it for us, 2000 years removed and in a completely different culture, to understand it? It's very hard, and most in Yeshua's body have not understood *Sha'ul*.

Truth is what we are all seeking, or at least we should be. If you are satisfied with what you already know about the faith you have professed, you are stagnant water. Don't be satisfied. Water that doesn't flow eventually becomes stagnant. *Mayim chayim*, living water, the water of the Spirit given to us by Yeshua, is flowing water, water that is alive rather than stagnant. And while we may think we already have all the truth and don't need any more, that is a complete falsehood. Several years ago, I heard a man make a series of statements I believe are profound truths. He said, "The Holy Spirit was constantly moving him." And he said, "While the Spirit doesn't change, he was constantly being moved by the Spirit." He meant that while the Spirit had not changed, ADONAI was constantly opening his eyes to more truth. We must return to the origin if we want to get the best answers. Truth is what we're about, not just for its own sake, but so that our actions will be in line with the truth. I'll say that again, "Our actions must be in line with the truth." If they are not, we are sinning.

There is a cartoon of a "guru" sitting on a mountain top, and people climb up to ask him "the meaning of life." Picture it: The guru is sitting there, and a man with a backpack and climbing ropes has just reached the top and is standing before him. The guru says: "You better have a seat. People tend to fall down the mountain when I tell them the meaning of life!" What is the meaning of life? How many will "fall down the mountain," fall down before the feet of Yeshua, when they learn the real truth of what *Sha'ul* was teaching? How many of us today don't understand what Yeshua is saying to us and what His disciples are trying to teach us through their writings? Many within the body don't understand, and many of them are satisfied with what they know. We cannot be satisfied with our current state. We have learned "more" of ADONAI's truth, and we can't go back to where we were. You have to want the truth! But to find it, you have to continually be a student.

Here's another difficult Scripture: *1 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Messiah Yeshua. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Messiah Yeshua has set you free from the law of sin and death.* (Romans 8:1-2 TLV). Some interpret this to mean that faith in Jesus has set us free from keeping the Law, but that is far from the truth. The law of sin and death is the complete opposite of the Law in the faith of Yeshua. One difficulty in understanding *Sha'ul* is that he used a single Greek word to convey two different words. *Nomos* is the word. According to Strong's Concordance, it means "that which is assigned,

hence usage, law." In *Sha'ul*'s writings, he sometimes meant "*Torah*," but the only word he had was "Law," *nomos*, because that was the only word available. Greek doesn't have a word that conveys *Torah* as "teaching and instruction," and that is the situation in these verses. We could better understand this verse as: "For the *Torah* of the Spirit of life in Messiah Yeshua has set you free from the *torah* of sin and death." They are two completely opposite things. Ezekiel prophesied about the first *Torah*, the *Torah* of the *Ruach*, the Spirit: *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 36:27 TLV). Both *Sha'ul* and Ezekiel were prophesying about the *Torah* of the *Ruach*, the "Spirit of Life in Messiah Yeshua." ADONAI said that He would place His Spirit within us and cause us to follow His *Torah*. In this verse, the word translated "laws" refers to ADONAI's judgments, and the word translated "rulings" refers to ADONAI's decrees. These are two of the three types of command; the third is "testimonies." As Ezekiel said, because ADONAI has placed His Spirit in us, we are to walk in obedience to His judgments, His decrees, and His testimonies. His judgments, called *Mishpatim*, are logical and ethical laws. They fundamentally deal with what is right or wrong, such as prohibitions against murder, robbery, covetousness, adultery, etc. Some of these appear in the Ten Commandments, but others appear throughout the *Torah*. His decrees, called *Chukim*, are divine decrees without explanation, such as the kosher laws, the Red Heifer, and *sha'atnez*, the mixing of wool and linen. Regarding the dietary laws, Israel is commanded to eat or not eat certain things even though ADONAI doesn't explain why. We obey because our Father has commanded it. Why is this important? It matters because *Sha'ul* has taught us trust-grounded obedience to all the mitzvot, the faith to keep them. His testimonies, called *Edot*, include keeping *Shabbat* and the festivals and eating *matzah* at Passover. For those who have trusted in Yeshua and become covenant members of the New Covenant, these laws are written on our hearts, as we are told by Jeremiah: *32 "But this is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days" —it is a declaration of Adonai— "I will put My Torah within them. Yes, I will write it on their heart. I will be their God, and they will be My people.*" (Jeremiah 31:32 TLV).

We talk about *Torah* obedience today and every day for two reasons. First, obedience follows Yeshua's sacrifice and the eternal life that comes with it. When a person accepts Yeshua's sacrifice by faith through ADONAI's grace, he receives the promise of salvation, and obedience follows. Second, we are studying *Sha'ul* and the Book of Romans, and the *Torah* is central to what he writes in this letter. Last week, we spoke about his concluding words. In Romans 16:26, *Sha'ul* prayed to ADONAI. In essence, he said that the mystery of the Gospel, as revealed by the prophets, had been communicated to the Gentiles in accordance with ADONAI's command to bring about trust-grounded obedience among them. He was talking about bringing about obedience to the commandments among the Gentiles who have trusted in Yeshua by faith, that is, those commandments that are active today. *Sha'ul* taught that those who are saved should follow the *Torah*, but today most of His Gentile followers believe the exact opposite; that the Law has been done away with. We obey because our Father has commanded it. Why is this important? It is important because *Sha'ul* has taught us that we are to have trust-grounded obedience to the *mitzvot*, ADONAI's commands, and that implies that we also need to know what they are. More importantly, we need to know which are active for us today, since some are presently inactive because there is no Temple or Levitical priesthood.

We began this segment of our discussion with this verse: *2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Messiah Yeshua has set you free from the law of sin and death.* (Romans 8:1-2 TLV). ADONAI proclaimed the law of the Spirit through Ezekiel and Jeremiah. The Law of the Spirit is that ADONAI's *Torah*, the *Torah* of Moses and the additional *Torah* which Yeshua

proclaimed during His life on earth, has been written on our hearts. *Sha'ul* says that this was done: *4 so that the requirement of the Torah might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Ruach.* (Romans 8:4 TLV). If we have the Holy Spirit, ADONAI's commandments have been written on our hearts. The *Torah* requires that those in Messiah be obedient; that is, we must have trust-grounded obedience to the *Torah* (or faith-grounded). This means that after we trust in Yeshua, we must do certain things commanded in the *Torah*. By doing so, we are not placing ourselves under the curse of the law, as some in the Church understand it.

The opposite of "the *Torah* of the Spirit of life in Messiah Yeshua," "the *torah* of sin and death," is easier to explain. Since *torah* means teaching and instruction, the *torah*, or law, of sin and death is our old nature's instruction to us in its desires. Without Yeshua, we follow a *torah* of sin and death provided by our old nature, the nature we received when born. Our old nature offers no redemption. We sin, and when we die, that's it. The sinful nature is our inheritance from our father Adam. ADONAI created Adam and Eve sinless and good, but because of their sin, sin entered the life of every human being thereafter, and every person today has a natural inclination toward sin. This is debated, with some saying otherwise. However, I believe that the Doctrine of Original Sin is correct. It is undergirded by certain Scriptures: 1. Romans 5:12 TLV: *12 So then, just as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, in the same way death spread to all men because all sinned.* 2. Psalm 51:5 TLV: *5 For I know my transgressions and my sin is ever before me.* 3. Ephesians 2:1-3 TLV: *1 You were dead in your trespasses and sins. 2 At that time, you walked in the way of this world, in conformity to the ruler of the domain of the air—the ruler of the spirit who is now operating in the sons of disobedience. 3 We too all lived among them in the cravings of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and the mind. By nature we were children of wrath, just like the others.* 4. 1 Corinthians 15:22 TLV: *22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Messiah will all be made alive.* While there is significant debate about this point, we can each have our opinion without creating division. What this means is that keeping the *Torah*, that is, obeying the laws, without Yeshua in our lives, cannot save us. There is no inherent salvation in being a child of Adam. *Sha'ul* said: *3 For what was impossible for the Torah—since it was weakened on account of the flesh—God has done. Sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as a sin offering, He condemned sin in the flesh—* (Romans 8:3 TLV). When we accept Yeshua, we receive a new nature, but we don't completely lose our old nature, our sin nature. It's still in there somewhere, but most of the time, for followers of Yeshua, our new nature, strengthened by the Holy Spirit living in us, suppresses it. But sometimes, we listen to it, and it causes us to sin. Too many times, really! *Sha'ul* describes his struggle with his sin nature in Romans 7:15-25. He had direct communication with Yeshua, but he still struggled with his old nature. He wrote: *18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me—that is, in my flesh. For to will is present in me, but to do the good is not.* (Romans 7:18 TLV). Scripture teaches us that the ability to sin remains in us. We will struggle with our old nature as long as we live. The *Torah* of sin and death remains part of our lives, but praise ADONAI, we have the Comforter, the *Ruach Kodesh*, the Spirit of God, living in us. He supplies the strength we need to overcome the pull of the sinful nature within us.

What is Israel's role in ADONAI's plan? *Sha'ul* wrote: *27 Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, "Though the number of B'nei-Israel be as the sand of the sea, only the remnant shall be saved. 28 For Adonai will carry out His word upon the earth, bringing it to an end and finishing quickly." 29 And just as Isaiah foretold, "Unless Adonai-Tzva'ot had left us seed, we would have become like Sodom and resembled Gomorrah."* (Romans 9:27-29 TLV). This is another mystery. Why did those who were given the Messiah first not receive Him? In general, the

Jews rejected Yeshua and continued to reject Him even after the Temple was destroyed. But many received Him. Just before the destruction of the Temple, we are told that tens of thousands of Judeans had trusted in Yeshua, and they were all zealous for the *Torah* (Acts 21). Those Jews are an example for us today. We should all be zealous for the *Torah*. But why are there not more Jews following Yeshua today?

30 What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness—that is, a righteousness of faith. 31 But Israel, who pursued a Torah of righteousness, did not reach the Torah. 32 Why? Because they pursued it not by faith, but as if it were from works. They stumbled over the stone of stumbling,… (Romans 9:30-32 TLV). Israel, the Jews of yesterday and today, the religious Jews, did not get the full and complete meaning of ADONAI's intention for the *Torah* because they pursued it from the standpoint of legalism and trusting in their status as children of Abraham that they would be declared righteous. And in doing this, they stumbled over the stone of stumbling, Yeshua (Isaiah 28:16), the precious cornerstone laid in Zion (Isaiah 8:14). *Sha'ul* continued: *33 just as it is written, "Behold, I lay in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, and whoever believes in Him shall not be put to shame*." (Romans 9:33 TLV). He was quoting Isaiah 28:16. Israel has stumbled, primarily over Jesus, but they will regain their footing. ADONAI has declared, "All Israel shall be saved!" (Romans 11:26).

We are citizens of the United States and inhabitants of the earth, but we also have other citizenship. *Sha'ul* said: *20 For our citizenship is in heaven, and from there we eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Yeshua the Messiah*. (Philippians 3:20 TLV). We are citizens of heaven, but how? What *Sha'ul* meant is that we are citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven. The word "heaven," *shamayim*, substitutes for the Hebrew word "G-d," *Elohim*. They mean the same, just as our substitution of the word ADONAI refers to our Father, whose Hebrew name is rendered by the letters יהוה, *Yod Heh Vav Heh*. The Kingdom of Heaven is the kingdom of our Messiah Yeshua and includes not only the earth, but the whole universe. By trusting in Him, we become both covenant members of the New Covenant and citizens of Heaven. He rules and reigns His kingdom from the right hand of His Father in heaven until He returns to establish it on earth.

Yeshua spoke a great deal about the Kingdom of Heaven. In one of His parables, He said: *45 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant searching for fine pearls. 46 Upon finding a pearl of great value, he went out and sold all that he had and bought it*. (Matthew 13:46 TLV). We, who have trusted Yeshua, are citizens of His kingdom. But have we valued "this pearl" as much as the merchant did? This parable represents the Kingdom of G-d or salvation, and teaches that following Yeshua and attaining spiritual truth is worth sacrificing everything else in life. Our citizenship is even better than *Sha'ul*'s Roman citizenship. In Jerusalem, he told the Centurion that he was a Roman citizen. *28 The commander answered, "I bought this citizenship for a large sum." Paul said, "But I was born so*." (Acts 22:28 TLV). Our citizenship in heaven is even more valuable than that, and just like *Sha'ul*'s Roman citizenship, we were born to it, that is, "born again to it." Our King is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, but how much do we value our citizenship in His kingdom? We have "the pearl of great price," but have we put it in a dresser drawer rather than placing it in the place of prominence it deserves?

Yeshua is not only our King, but also our *Kohen HaGadol*, our High Priest. He is the mediator of our faith, and He intercedes for us before the Father day and night. Under Him, we are *kohenim*, priests, who are proclaiming His kingdom until He comes again. As His *kohenim*, our *s'micha*, our ordination, requires that we be obedient to Him. *S'micha* is the

physical laying on of hands for ordination. Yeshua's Holy Spirit has laid hands on us, and we are ordained just as Moses laid hands on Aaron and his sons. As His priests, are we obedient to Him? We have been taught, but what do we do with what we have learned? Do you call yourself a believer? Yes, I do too. But *HaSatan* is also a believer. He knows that Yeshua is the "seed of the woman," the Son of David, who will one day crush his head. He knows it, but because of his completely sinful nature, he can't stop what he is doing. We must do more than believe; we must be *talmidim*, disciples, constantly studying to be approved (2 Timothy 2:15). We must go beyond being a believer and be a *talmid*, a disciple. The word disciple comes from the Latin *discipulus*, meaning student. Discipline, a related word, is from the Latin *disciplina*, meaning, guess what, teaching and instruction? Isn't that a coincidence? *Torah* means "teaching and instruction," and discipline means "teaching and instruction." If you are a disciple, a student of Yeshua, are you willing to let Him discipline you? If you say yes, be careful. If you say yes, you are committing to follow His commands. We have been taught, but what do we do with what we have learned? Do we put it in a drawer, as some have done with the Pearl of Great Price? No, we don't. Through our faith and ADONAI's grace, we will walk in His commandments and proclaim that the Kingdom of Heaven is here! *Shabbat shalom*!