

## EKEV { עֵקֶב } - (Because)

Deuteronomy 7:12-11:25, Isaiah 49:14-51:2, Hebrews 11:8-13

### A Messianic Jewish Commentary by Hannah Neshet

**“And it shall come to pass, *because* { עֵקֶב } you hearken to these ordinances, and keep, and do them, that the Lord your God shall keep with you the covenant and the mercy which He swore to your fathers, and He will love you, and bless you, and multiply you.”**

(Deuteronomy 7:12-13)

Parashat Ekev begins with the blessings and benefits we will receive from God *because* we obey His Word. Some of these rewards include: prosperity, protection, favor, and good health.

It is not enough, however, to simply ‘hear’ God’s commandments; we must also be diligent to ‘do them’, as it is written: **“But be a doer of the word and not only a hearer, and do not deceive yourselves.”** (James 1:22)

**“For it is not those who hear the law (Torah) who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law (Torah) who will be declared righteous.”** (Romans 2:13)



Photo by James Tissot The Golden Calf (Wikipedia)

The title of this week’s parashah ‘Ekev’ is used in this context as the word ‘because’ or ‘if’. Just as a conjunction connects groups of words, phrases, or sentences together, ‘ekev’ (because) demonstrates that our obedience is the conjunction or connecting force between us and God’s blessings.

**“You will be blessed above all peoples...and Adonai will take away from you all sickness.”**  
(Deuteronomy 7:14-15)

These blessings are all based upon two of the most powerful forces in the Universe: covenant (brit) and mercy (chesed). God repeatedly promises that He will not break the covenantal promises He swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Israel) and to their descendants:

**“He remembers His covenant forever...The covenant which he made with Abraham, and His oath to Isaac, and confirmed it to Jacob for a statute, to Israel as an everlasting covenant, saying, “To you I will give the land of Canaan...” (Psalms 105:8-11)**

God has chosen us *because He loves us, and because He keeps the oath which He swore to our forefathers.*<sup>1</sup> We may be reaping tremendous benefits and blessings today because of the faithfulness of our ancestors. We can be extremely thankful for their dedication, devotion, and sacrifice. . Selah. (Pause and think upon this.)

I know that I am blessed today to a large degree because of the faithfulness of my parents, grandparents, great grandparents and on down the generations, all the way back to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

When my grandparents came from pogrom–persecuted Russia and Poland to build a new life in Canada, they obeyed the commandments of God. Pioneers, they cleared the land and built a log house with their own hands. For six days a week they labored in the fields, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, they feared the Lord and did not farm the Land.

I am told the story that when it was a beautiful, clear summer day on the Sabbath and rain was forecast for the entire coming week, my ‘Zaida’ (grandfather) Jacob desperately needed to harvest the crops. But instead, he would sit inside their little cabin on the Holy Sabbath, wringing his hands and moaning,, “Oye vey, oye vey...” over and over again.

And yet he feared the Lord and would not dishonor Him by profaning the Sabbath day. Even in the wilderness of Northern Alberta, Canada, they maintained their devotion to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Yaacov), Israel.

In their latter years, when my grandparents left the farm to move closer to their children in the city, all the farmers in the area cried, saying, “*Who will now pray to God for our crops when Jacob the Jew is gone?*” They knew that even their farms had been blessed because of Jacob’s obedience to God’s statutes and commandments.



Baba Esther and Zaida Jacob

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<sup>1</sup> Deuteronomy 7:8

**“Therefore know that the Lord your God, He is *Elohim*, the faithful God who *keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations* with those who love Him and keep his commandments.” (Deuteronomy 7:9)**

When we choose to love God and to keep His commandments, not only do we receive God’s blessing on our own lives, but also upon our children, children’s children, and for a thousand generations down the line! Wow! This is powerful!

## On the Heels of the Messiah

Another meaning of the Hebrew word, Ekev, is ‘heel’ (as in the heel of a foot). It is the root of Jacob’s Hebrew name, Yaacov. Ancient Jewish sages interpreted this dual meaning of the word ‘ekev’ to refer to the generation of the *“heels of Moshiach (Messiah).”* The last generation of the Exile is called ‘ikvata d’meshichah’, “the heels of Moshiach”; since it is considered to be the generation that will hear the ‘footsteps of the Messiah’.

The word ‘ekev’ is first used in Genesis in an important prophecy that the seed of Chava (Eve) will eventually crush the heel (ekev) of the serpent.

**“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head and you will strike his heel (ekev).” (Genesis 3:15)**

This is the first Messianic prophecy in the Bible – the enemy would attempt to ‘crush’ the Messiah but instead, he would destroy the works of the devil.

“The one who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.” (1 John 3:8)

## Dispossessing the Inhabitants of the Land

After instructing the nation of Israel to walk in obedience to Him in order to receive His blessings, God then commanded Israel to not only go in and possess the Land; but also to completely destroy its inhabitants:

**“You are to devour all the peoples that *ADONAI* your God hands over to you. Your eye shall have no pity on them, nor shall you serve their gods, for that will be a snare to you.” (Deuteronomy 7:16)**

This was one of Israel’s worst mistakes – they failed to destroy the inhabitants of the land: **“They did not destroy the peoples, concerning whom the Lord had commanded them, but they mingled with the *goyim* (Gentile nations).” (Psalms 106:34 & 35)**

Even today, it seems that in an attempt to appease the world, Israel is making dangerous concessions to the Palestinian ‘inhabitants of the Land’ that may threaten our very survival as a nation.

For those who struggle with the morality of God’s command here, we can keep in mind that Israel’s conquest of her homeland is not unique. In fact, nearly every country that exists today has conquered the original inhabitants of their present homeland and to a large degree destroyed or dispossessed them.

Of course, Israel as a nation, both in Biblical times and today, welcomes those who wish to dwell together in peace. Arabic people who wish to do so are given full Israeli citizenship and benefits, including health care, the right to vote and occupy seats in the Knesset (Israeli parliament). There are, however, radical, destructive elements that (because they have been allowed to remain) threaten the survival of the nation of Israel still today.

## Destructo Dog

God has given each one of us a territory that He wants us to possess for His Kingdom. However, in order to do so, we must first **dispossess the enemy**. What is it from the Kingdom of Darkness that needs to be driven out of our lives? Perhaps some negative thinking patterns? fear? doubt? unbelief? self-pity? anger? bitterness?

My daughter, Courtney, gave me such a wonderful example of why it is so important to first get rid of these destructive elements before we can ‘possess the land.’ For some reason, she got the notion in her head to get a dog. Although I love dogs, I felt compelled to warn her, “*Don’t get a dog!*” But as we all know, sometimes we have to learn the hard way. ☺



Courtney, Yoah and Moonie

So off they went to the local Israeli animal shelter to choose a puppy. That was their first mistake. My daughter has a soft heart and couldn’t bear the thought that these animals would be put to sleep if she didn’t take them; so she came home not with one dog, and not two dogs, and not three or even four dogs, but FIVE DOGS. Yes, my friends, count them – f.i.v.e. dogs!

And we’re not talking little poodles here either – four of them were full grown, shepherd size dogs. It is unbelievable the chaos, mess, and destruction that these dogs brought into their household. The shepherd had just had a litter of puppies, so you can imagine the mess she made (yuck!), not to mention her being seriously depressed.

The Retriever mix was so hyper she needed mega-doses of Ritalin or something to calm her down; and the other unidentified mutt was so aggressive she kept attacking the others.

The puppy they brought home, whom they called Moonie, had distemper and almost died, costing them a small fortune in veterinary bills. Miraculously, however, due to Courtney's motherly vigil over him and her continual TLC (tender loving care) the pup lived and grew up into the most happily destructive dog I have ever encountered in my life!

"*Destructo Dog*" as I called him, chewed up anything and everything within his reach, including Courtney's husband Emanuel's best suit, several pairs of their most expensive shoes, important documents, and the children's favorite toys. There was seldom a time when I could go over to their home and not hear their cries of despair over the most recent 'victim' of Moonie's destructive obsession.

The worst target of Moonie's destruction, however, was the garden. Courtney and her family live in a beautiful home in a village (moshav) with the most gorgeous view and an incredibly beautiful (not to mention expensive) garden. However, Moonie kept chewing the irrigation hoses, causing the flowers and vegetation to dry up and die.

His incessant digging, chewing and waste products were absolutely destroying this lovely garden, which was a source of terrible sorrow and aggravation to those who had invested so much time, money and energy in creating it. When the gardener came, he spoke to them in typically Israeli style - straight and direct!

He said, "*Your dog is destroying this garden. No matter what we do, it will not help much as long as this dog is in the yard. You can either have a beautiful, healthy garden or you can have this dog, but you cannot have both. It is your choice. You must decide.*" Finally, after much prayer, God in His mercy, found another home for Moonie and eventually all of the other dogs as well, thank God.

At our prayer meeting one day, we were discussing this Parashah about dispossessing the enemy before taking the land and Courtney showed us a beautiful reddish-orange and yellow flowering bush. "*See that bush?*", she asked. We all noticed and commented on its' beautiful blossoms. This bush was totally dry and devoid of all apparent life until Moonie was sent to another home.

But once the destructive element in the home and surroundings was removed, life returned to the garden and peace was restored to their family. (*And yes, I did resist the temptation to say, "I told you so..."* 😊)



This is such a vivid illustration of the importance of getting rid of the destructive elements in our own lives - dispossessing the enemy - before we can really 'take the Land'; and thrive in our

environment. The Lord has chosen us and appointed us to bear much fruit but we cannot do so while continual destructive forces are allowed to remain.

Do we cling to negative associations with people who may be leading us astray or dragging us down? Perhaps there are unwise friendships or unwholesome activities – destructive elements that need to be released from our life in order to really make progress?

## Unsanctified Mercy – Keeping Jonah in the Boat

Sometimes what stops us from doing what we know we should do is simply pity. God said, “*Don’t pity them.*” Of course we are to be kind, good, and merciful with people; but there is such a thing as ‘**unsanctified mercy**’. Sometimes God wants to deal with someone; but our ‘pitying them’ is actually standing in God’s way.

Under certain circumstances, we may need to overcome our ‘pity’ and obey God to allow the destruction that is in alignment with His purposes. There are times when the people were instructed to ‘**hand such a person over to Satan to destroy his corrupt nature so that his spiritual nature may be saved on the day of the Lord.**’ (1 Corinthians 5:5)

Some of us are keeping a Jonah in our boat. The storm is raging and threatening to drown us all, but “*oh no, we could never throw him overboard*”, even if it cost us our lives! We need to be wise as a serpent and gentle as a dove, always listening for the voice of the Spirit, knowing when to hold on and when to let go.

If we always pity our children, we may fail to discipline them properly with the rod and rebuke. They will not be forced to deal with their sinful nature and this weakness will emotionally and spiritually cripple them. We must realize when the enemy is using our compassionate natures against us, and overcome this ‘unsanctified mercy’ in order to obey God in all things.

## Little by Little

God promised to drive out these wicked nations ‘**little by little**’ (Deuteronomy 7:22). In Hebrew we say, “*l’at, l’at*”. Our deliverance or healing may not happen overnight; but may be a gradual process of transformation towards our freedom in Messiah. Again Courtney gave me an excellent word picture (thanks Courtney!).

At this time she was in her 8<sup>th</sup> month of pregnancy when the nesting instinct was kicking in full force. She was consumed with a desire to clean and organize in preparation for the blessed baby boy that was soon to be born. Of course with limitations on her time and energy, she could not do this all at once. Instead she tackled one overstuffed closet, ...one messy cupboard... a couple of disorganized shelves or drawers at a time.

It is the same way with the things in our lives that are out of order as well. We cannot tackle the whole mess at once, or we’d become overwhelmed. Instead, God’s Holy Spirit has an individualized program designed for each one of us. He is changing us little by little from glory to glory. (2 Corinthians 3:18)

We have to start from where we are and move forward in faith. Like my blessed mother used to tell me when I was feeling overwhelmed by dreaded housecleaning, “*Just start in one corner and keep moving outward from there.*”

One step and one day at a time.

## The Accursed Things - Cherem

God also warned Israel not to covet their silver or gold; and not to bring an ‘**abomination**’ (cherem in Hebrew) into their house. “**You shall utterly detest it, and you shall utterly abhor it; for it is ‘cherem’.**” (Deuteronomy 7:25-26)

What exactly is ‘cherem’? What are these abominations that we are forbidden from bringing into our homes? These include heathen, idolatrous images; but may also include other abominations that have no place in a Believer’s home.

I wrote about this in an article called “[Valley of Achor.](#)” I include excerpts from this article here but please check out the website for the complete version.<sup>2</sup>

In the book of Joshua, Israel had suffered a terrible defeat against the nation of Ai. Joshua fell on his face before the Lord, asking “*Why, Lord?*” “**Why have You brought us over the Jordan only to be delivered into the hand of the Amorites to destroy us?**” (Joshua 7:7)

This defeat followed right on the tail of their stunning victory in Jericho. Just after the mighty walls of Jericho came crashing down with just the blast of their shofarot<sup>3</sup>, Israel ended up being chased, tails between their legs, by the insignificant army of Ai. “...**therefore the hearts of the people melted and became like water.**” (Joshua 7:5)

What was God’s answer to Joshua? “*Get up! Israel has sinned. They have taken some of the accursed things and put it amongst their own stuff.*” God revealed the reason He was no longer giving Israel victory – it was because **of the accursed things**. In Hebrew, the word used is **Herem {חרם}**.

God had warned Israel not to take anything from the spoils of Jericho or they would bring a curse upon it and ‘trouble’ it. (Joshua 6:18) Here the Hebrew word used is from the same root for **trouble – achar**.

Who could have brought this trouble upon Israel? It was a man whose name actually means trouble – **Achar**. It also means ‘**gloominess**’. Enough trouble in our life can make us gloomy, pessimistic, always expecting something to go wrong.

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<sup>2</sup> [www.voiceforisrael.net/articles](http://www.voiceforisrael.net/articles)

<sup>3</sup> Plural for shofar, ram’s horn, used in spiritual and physical battle

In his greed, Achan had taken a beautiful Babylonian garment, as well as some gold and silver and had hidden it under his tent. His false thinking that no one would ever discover it automatically reveals his unbelief in God who sees all things. This brought defeat upon Israel.

What was God's remedy for defeat? Destruction of the Herem! When the accursed things were found under Achan's tent, evidence of his sin of covetousness and disobedience, everything – this included Achan, his sons, his daughters, his donkeys, sheep, oxen, the accursed things, even his tent – they carried all that belonged to him to the **Valley of Achor (trouble)**.

There, they were stoned to death and then burned with fire. Joshua said, ***“Why have you troubled us? The Lord will trouble you this day.”*** (Joshua 7:25). This contains a lesson for each of us. There is no remedy for sin but its complete removal.

Until these accursed things were removed from their midst and destroyed, Israel would not be able to stand before their enemies. They were doomed to destruction! God's presence would not be with them anymore until they found the 'cherem' in their midst and utterly destroyed it. (Josh 7:12)

We must also search our home for any possible 'cherem', asking the Holy Spirit to reveal any hidden accursed thing and immediately get rid of it. What are we allowing into our homes that God may consider an 'accursed thing' or abomination?

These could include anything from pornographic materials to violent video games. Many of the toys that are sold to children are demonic and should not come into our homes. Books about occult and wizardry need to be destroyed, or even burned with fire. ***“The graven images of their gods shall you burn with fire...”*** (Deuteronomy 7:25)

All this 'cherem' can bring defeat into our lives and prevent us from walking in victory. Destroying these items devoted to destruction can bring a return of blessing to our life.

There is another important principle revealed here that may help us walk in greater victory. Why did God not allow Israel to take any of the spoils of Jericho when they were allowed to take the spoil from other battles? It was because Jericho was the first city taken in their conquest of the Promised Land; therefore Jericho was the *first-fruits* of the Land – and the first-fruits always belong to the Lord.

This is why it is so important to give God our tithe – the first-fruits (a tenth) of all of our income. If we keep the tithe in our possession then we are doing what Achan did and will bring a curse of destruction upon our own lives.

***“Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; so your barns will be filled with plenty And your vats will overflow with new wine.”*** (Proverbs 3:9-10)  
If we will obey God to bring our full tithe into His house, then He will rebuke the devourer for our sake; and instead of destruction we will reap a great blessing: "Then I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of the ground; nor will your vine in the field cast its grapes," says the LORD of hosts." (Malachi 3:11)

## The Chastening of El Shaddai

God, as a father, disciplines and trains His children – even through hunger, hardship and suffering in the desert. The Hebrew word for desert or **wilderness** is **midbar** which uses the same root letters as the word **m’daber – to speak**.

God speaks tenderly to our hearts in these wilderness times, as He did with Gomer, the unfaithful wife of the prophet Hosea. God also uses these dry, barren, and lonely times of weary wandering in our spiritual lives in order **“To test us, to see what is in our heart, whether we will keep His commandments or not.”** (Deuteronomy 8:2)

God chastens (disciplines) us as His beloved children: **“As a man chastens his son, so the Lord thy God chastens you.”** (Deuteronomy 8:5) He used even the hardship and suffering in the desert as part of His discipline.

The Rabbis call these **‘Chastisements of Love.’** The Father chastises those He loves. **“For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.”** (Hebrews 12:6)

When speaking of God’s discipline, the name of God used is ‘Shaddai’. **“Do not despise the chastisement of Shaddai** (Prov. 3:11-12). Shaddai is an interesting name for God. It comes from a Hebrew root word meaning **a woman’s breast**.

This specific name, Shaddai, represents the maternal, gentle, nourishing characteristics of God. What does this tell us when it is this name used in the context of God’s discipline? His discipline is just but merciful.

Generally speaking, a mother’s discipline is more generously tempered with mercy than the father’s. It is the father who is warned not to be overly harsh with their children so as not to provoke them to become discouraged. (Ephesians 6:4)

This may not be the case with everyone, but it certainly holds true for me. When I was a child, I instinctively knew to approach my mother, rather than my father with any request. When I had made a mistake or done something wrong, it was my mother I went to for leniency and my father whose wrath I feared.

Of course no chastening or discipline seems pleasant in the short term, but when the Lord is chastening us, we can know that it will eventually produce good results. **“No chastisement seems joyful for the present but painful, but afterwards yields peaceable fruit of righteousness.”** (Hebrews 12:11)

It is important during times of testing that we do not harden our hearts in the midst of the trials: **“Do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the desert.”** (Hebrews 3:8)

Sometimes it helps me, when going through a hard time, to say to myself, “This is just a test...this is just a test...” Whether we pass the test or not, however, may determine whether or not we go around the same dumb mountain one more time, or finally move on to cross the Jordan.

The true test, when going through difficulty or suffering, is whether or not we can ‘**count it all joy**’ when we find ourselves going through various trials and tests, realizing God is at work in us. “**Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.**” (James 1:2-3)

The Talmud (oral law) states that “*Those who...rejoice in their sufferings, they are the lovers of God.*” The Hebrew word for **trial** is ‘**nisayon**, from a Hebrew word meaning ‘**To try**’ - **l’nasot**. Therefore it has been said that we cannot fail a test from God; we only get **to try, try, try again** until we get it right.

Recently, a car accident in Israel which totaled my vehicle left me ‘without wheels’ – and in the summer yet! This meant that at a time when the children were all home from school and we could go places and do enjoyable activities together, transportation was an issue.

Added to this was another silly accident I had the other day in the laundry room. I tripped over Avi’s bike, sprained my toe and did something to my hip that made it extremely painful to even walk around the block with the dog. Poor Pepper... Poor me!

At that time, it no longer felt that I was simply grounded on the moshav; it seemed that I was under house arrest! ☺ My walking abilities were limited to within the house and believe me, there were times when I struggled to ‘count it all joy’.

But I thanked God that I could at least still write. (When he was a little boy, my youngest son, Avi told me that writing is ‘a good job for an ‘old person’. ☺) This ‘chastening’ also gave me more relaxed time with my children at home that I think we all desperately need. Sometimes if we will not lie down voluntarily, He will ‘*make us to lie down*’ beside still waters.

Most, if not all, great men of God - Joseph, David, Moses, and even Yeshua, all had to endure times of testing in the wilderness. Generally, the longer the time of preparation required in the wilderness, the greater the destiny of the individual.<sup>4</sup> “**Before honor comes humility.**” (Proverbs 15:33)

We can really thank God for His discipline and also the correction that wise people speak into our lives, because it is for our good. It is a fool who despises correction and will not listen to rebuke. “**A fool spurns a parent’s discipline, but whoever heeds correction shows prudence.**” (Proverbs 15:5)

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<sup>4</sup> A complete message on the wilderness experience has been recorded and is available on DVD, [Walking in the Wilderness](http://www.voiceforisrael.net), [www.voiceforisrael.net](http://www.voiceforisrael.net)

Other Scriptures also show us the value of listening to and receiving correction:

**“Stern discipline awaits anyone who leaves the path; the one who hates correction will die.** (Proverbs 15:10)

**“Mockers resent correction, so they avoid the wise.** (Proverbs 15:12)

**“Whoever heeds life-giving correction will be at home among the wise.** (Proverbs 15:31)

**“Those who disregard discipline despise themselves, but the one who heeds correction gains understanding** (Proverbs 15:32)

### A Good Land

God promises, that after passing through the hardships of the wilderness, He is bringing them into **a good land...a land of vines and fig trees and pomegranates**...a land where we will not lack for anything. (Deuteronomy 8:7- 9)

I am still amazed to be living in this Land! There are figs, grape vines, and pomegranates that grow in our own yard in the village. It is absolute proof to me that God is faithful to His word.



Seven Species of the Land

God promised to bring us into this good land; but He didn't promise it would be easy! We need to be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. **“Be strong! Believe in the Lord and trust in His mighty power.”** (Ephesians 6:10)

When we follow where the Lord is leading us, we won't always know where He is taking us, but we can trust that it will be a **‘good land’**. All that God asks is that we don't forget him. **“Beware, lest you forget the Lord your God.”** (Deuteronomy 8:11)

Unfortunately it seems to be human nature to seek God most intently when we are in trouble and then forget about him in times of prosperity, blessing and success.

When God has blessed and increased and multiplied us, we must resist the temptation to think that we have accumulated all we have **by the power and might of our own hand**. (Deuteronomy 8:17). Forgetting God in times of prosperity eventually leads to personal or national disaster.

## The Power to get Chayil

The Psalmist was wise to understand that Israel did not gain possession of the Land by the power and might of her own hand, but rather **because of Adonai's favor** upon her. It still holds true today in our battle for the Land of Israel!

“It was not by their sword that they won the land, nor did their arm bring them victory; it was your right hand, your arm, and the light of your face, for you favored them. You are my King and my God, who decrees victories for Jacob. Through you we push back our enemies; through your name we trample our foes. I put no trust in my bow, my sword does not bring me victory; but you give us victory over our enemies, you put our adversaries to shame. In God we make our boast all day long, and we will praise your name forever.” (Psalm 44:3-8)

We may look at ourselves and feel that we are not able. It is true that by ourselves we can do nothing; but it is also a great truth that with God all things are possible to those who believe. **“What is impossible with men is possible with God”.** ( Luke 18:27)

Let us not be dismayed or discouraged by our all too obvious faults and weaknesses, remembering that it is not by our limited abilities or for our righteousness sake that we take possession of our land, but **because of God's great favor!**

It is God who gives us the power to get wealth, not our job or any other person. God is our true source of blessing, because of the promise He made to the Patriarchs.

**“But you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He that gives you power to get wealth; that He may establish His covenant which He swore unto your fathers, as it is this day.”**  
(Deuteronomy 8:18).

Although translated in most English Bibles as ‘the power to get wealth’, the Hebrew word used is ‘**chayil**’, which may be used as wealth, but also means might, strength or vigor. It can also refer to a soldier in the army, and is actually the same word used to describe the Proverbs 31 woman of valor - **eshet chayil**. (Proverbs 31:10)

Any woman who can keep up with all that is described in Proverbs 31 most definitely deserves a medal of honor as far as I'm concerned! ☺



Israeli female chayalim (soldiers)

## Because of Covenant

God makes it clear that it **was not because of their own righteousness** that Israel would now go in to possess the Land, (for they were a stubborn, stiff-necked, rebellious people) but **because of the Word that God swore to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob.** (Deuteronomy 9:5-6)

Here are these words again: **because** and **covenant**. These words should give us hope for our own lives. When we are confronted by a sense of our own unworthiness, ashamed by our sinfulness – our stubbornness and rebellion – we can still count on God’s faithfulness to the covenant we have with Him through His son, Yeshua.

We know that our own righteousness is like filthy rags before the holiness of God (Isaiah 64:6); but we also know that: **”God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”** (2 Corinthians 5:21)

We are God’s people and His inheritance, a special treasure (segulah) to the Almighty. Because of our covenant relationship with Him, God will never leave us nor forsake us. **“For the Lord will not cast off His people, Nor will He forsake His inheritance.”** (Psalm 94:14).

In light of this awesome covenantal relationship we have with our faithful God, what is our part of the bargain? **What does God really require of us?** God doesn’t ask for anything impossible or even extraordinary; only **to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways, and to love him, and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul; to keep His commandments and statutes.**” (Deuteronomy 10:12-13)

God is not so much desiring a circumcised foreskin in the flesh; but rather that we **circumcise the foreskin of our heart and yield our will to His.** (Deuteronomy 10:16). Mother Teresa once said that it is not about doing great things; but rather doing small things with great love.

God wants us to **love Him and to cleave to Him.** (Deuteronomy 10:20) The word for **cleave** in Hebrew is **‘devek’** - the same word used for **glue!** God wants us to *stick to Him like glue.* Just as a man *is to leave his mother and father and ‘cleave’ (be glued) to his wife,* so does God want an intimate relationship with us, as a Bride with her Groom.

Our forefather Abraham first believed, and then out of his faith, he obeyed God through the rite of circumcision. It was his faith which was counted unto him as righteousness; however, out of his faith flowed obedience to God’s Torah. We are exhorted, through the ancient prophet, Yeshayahu (Isaiah) to look to Abraham, our father of faith.

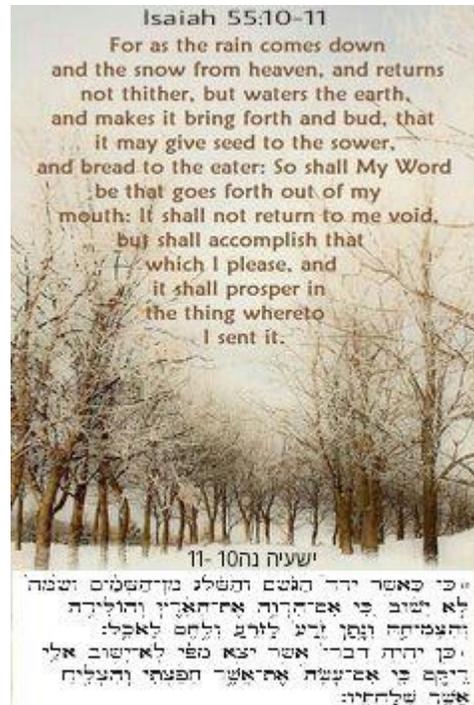
“Listen to me, you pursuers of justice, you who seek *ADONAI*: consider the rock from which you were cut, the quarry from which you were dug — consider Avraham your father and Sarah, who gave birth to you...” (Isaiah 51:1-2)

## A Land that God Cares For

This portion of Scripture also tells us that the Land of Israel is not an ordinary country. **It is a land that God cares for; the eyes of the Lord thy God are on this land continually.** (Deuteronomy 11:12)

The rains are such a blessing on this Land. It almost never rains for the entire summer, so when the first rains come in the fall, all the people rejoice.

It was only when the people turned away from the Lord to serve other gods that God withheld the rains, causing a drought in the Land. (Deuteronomy 11:17)



## Haftorah Ekev: Comfort after Loss

This is the second message of hope and comfort after Tisha B'Av's remembrance of the destruction of both Holy Temples, and the fall of Jerusalem. This prophetic portion from the book of Isaiah deals with the issue of LOSS. God and Zion are like a couple whose relationship has been damaged.

Like a husband and his bride who have experienced many losses through betrayal, unfaithfulness and abandonment, they are both searching for connection. The bride wonders about her estranged husband, **“Does he still care?”**

**“Zion says the Lord has forsaken me.”** (Isaiah 49:14) Zion cries out with insecurity and desperation, feeling abandoned by God during her Babylonian exile (Psalm 137). By the rivers of Babylon, the exiles of Israel hung up their harps on the willow trees and wept. “Will we ever return to Zion? Will we ever sing the joyful songs of the Lord again?”

When my middle son's father abandoned me, I wondered if I would ever feel joy or sing again; but God brought me into the wilderness and turned the **Valley of Achor (trouble)** into a **door of hope (petach tikvah)**. **Yeshua is the gate** to that door of hope. Yeshua said, **“I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture.”** (John 10:9)

Yeshua is **the way** through our *valleys of trouble*. He said to Gomer, Hosea's unfaithful wife,

**“Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the wilderness and speak tenderly to her. There I will give her back her vineyards, and will make the Valley of Achor (trouble) a door of hope (Petah Tikvah).**

**There she will sing as in the days of her youth, as in the day she came up out of Egypt.”** (Hosea 2:14,15)

This is my own personal testimony as well. <sup>5</sup> God saved me and brought me back to Zion, the Land of my Fathers. Therefore I have taken my harp off the willows and it is my privilege to play and to sing as in the days of my youth. Halleluyah!

Israel is portrayed as the rejected wife, bereaved of children, exiled, mourning her terrible losses. And yet God gives her hope and reaffirms His love to her.

**“Can a woman forget her suckling child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yes, these may forget, yet I will not forget you”** (Isa. 49:15)

God says that His love is more enduring than even the love of a mother for her own nursing, helpless infant. That is the strongest of human affections and yet God’s love is stronger than even this!

We can be assured that: **“Though my mother and father forsake me, yet God will take care of me.”** (Psalm 27:10)

Recently, I attended a gathering of Believers in Israel where Merv and Merla Watson entertained and ministered to us with music and song. They played one song that seemed to have very few lyrics besides the words, **“I will not forget you.”**

It brought sweet tears to my eyes to watch Merla dramatizing the song as a mother caring for her infant child. We are that child to God and He will never forget us.

**As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you; and you will be comforted over Jerusalem.”** (Isaiah 66:13)



Courtney with Baby Yoah

God says to Zion, **“Behold, I have engraved you upon the palms of My hands”** (Isaiah 49:16). Zion is engraved upon God’s hand, just as God has asked us to bind His word on ours.

**“And you shall bind them as a sign upon your hand...”** (Deuteronomy 11:18).

What is our reaction to loss? Does it also cause us to doubt God’s love for us?

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<sup>5</sup> See [Hannah, Grafted in again](#) to read Hannah’s personal testimony or watch DVD [Because He Lives](#), filmed on location at pro-life conference near Jerusalem, Israel

Our greatest fear is that even God has stopped caring about us, stopped loving us. Like Zion, we may cry out in pain and confusion, “Are you there, God? Do you still care? *Do you still love me, God?!*” But God says **He will never forget us, never stop loving us, and never leave us or forsake us.**

Like Israel, some have lost hope because of their great losses through widowhood, divorce, death, financial loss, loss of health, relationships, or problems with children. We may think the case is closed. Perhaps we feel guilty or ashamed that our loss is due to own rebellion or sin. We wonder if perhaps God has forgotten or forsaken us also.

## You are Not Forgotten

As a new (and completely clueless) believer in Yeshua the Messiah, I got myself into a whole heap of trouble through my own foolishness by marrying an abusive man in the Christian Church which I began attending after coming to faith. This man was truly a ‘wolf in sheep’s clothing’ who preyed upon the newborn lambs in the flock.

Rather than listening to some concerned people’s warnings (what was that I just quoted about listening to rebuke?), I went ahead with the wedding. After suffering through a terrible time of emotional and physical abuse, I felt so completely broken.

One Sunday, when I came to church limping and bruised, someone asked what had happened and I confessed to what was going on at home. This woman wept, promising to talk to the Pastor’s wife, but nothing was done.

I gave up, feeling like God had abandoned me also. There came a day when I couldn’t bring myself to go inside the church anymore and sing songs of hope and victory when I felt so defeated. I just stood outside that day in the pouring rain.

The Pastor, seeing me standing outside, came to join me, getting his beautiful three piece suit soaked in the process. He said only a few words to me, but they brought such comfort to my soul. He said, “*Hannah, you are not forgotten.*” This helped give me the courage I needed to take refuge in a woman’s shelter.

God is with us, even when we go through times of trouble and walk through valleys of the shadow of death. God says, “**I will contend with him who contends with you and I will save your children.**” (Isaiah 49:25) This is a good Word to write on our walls and post upon our gates!

Israel, languishing in exile, doubted if the ancient covenant relationship between her and God was still intact. Had God, by exiling Israel, divorced her? Much of the church would answer yes. *God has divorced Israel and now the Christian Church is the ‘new Israel’.* This is called ‘Replacement Theology’.

But in reality, God and Israel are not divorced. They are only temporarily separated. God asks, **“Where is your mother’s get?”** (Isaiah 50:1) There is as yet no ‘get’ – the Hebrew word for a bill of divorce.

Only the ‘get’ would make the separation final. But there is no get. Therefore the door is still open to reconciliation and restoration. God and Israel are bound by an Eternal covenant (Jeremiah 31:36 & 37)

The separation has hurt both parties; God also feels abandoned and betrayed by Israel turning to other gods like a spouse’s sexual infidelity and unfaithfulness. As much as we long for relationship with God, He also yearns for our affection. “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.” (James 4:8)

Even in our own relationships that are strained, alienated, divided, and separated, there is still hope. Is God’s **hand (yad)** too short to save? Has he no **power** to deliver? (Isaiah 50:2) God’s hand (yad in Hebrew) represents His power. Let us not doubt the power of God to save and deliver, to restore and heal what was broken. Can we believe this?

**Yeshua said that all things are possible if we will only believe.** (Mark 9:23) May we not harden our heart through unbelief for only those who believe will enter His rest (Hebrews 3:19, 4:3)

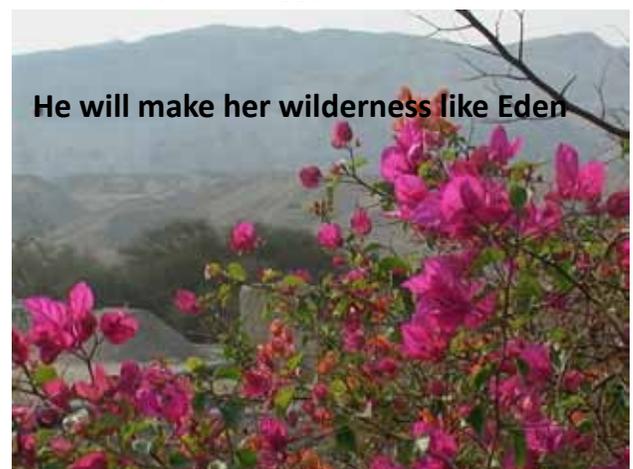
What is the basis of our faith in God’s mercy? Not because of our righteousness but based on our covenant with God through Yeshua who fulfilled the Messianic Prophecy:

**“I gave my back to the smiters & my cheeks to those who plucked off the hair. I hid not my face from shame and spitting.... Therefore the Lord God will help me.”** (Isaiah 50:6-7)

Is there a situation that is total darkness without even a glimmer of light or hope? We must simply trust in the Lord and obey His voice for there’s no other way to be happy in Yeshua than to trust and obey.

**“Who fears the Lord and obeys His voice?  
Though he walk in darkness and has no light?  
Let him trust in the name of the Lord and rely  
upon his God.”** (Isaiah 50:10).

**“For the Lord will comfort Zion, comfort all her  
waste places. He will make her wilderness like  
Eden and her desert like the garden of the Lord.  
Joy and gladness will be found in it.  
Thanksgiving and the voice of melody.”** (Isaiah  
51:3)



## Israel – a Beacon of Hope to the World

Israel stands as a sign to the entire earth of God's mercy and enduring love. Her deserts, waste places and wilderness areas are blooming like the Garden of Eden. Each flower which blooms in the desert of Israel is a personal bouquet to God's beloved Bride that He can and He will make our barren places to flourish and thrive.

And her desert like the garden of the Lord. (Isa. 51:3)

We must not be afraid to leave our place of exile, even the green and fertile fields of Babylon to face an unknown future in what looks to be a barren wasteland. God will make those waste places bloom and blossom again; there will be heard the voice of singing, melody and thanksgiving where once there was no life.

Yeshua said, **"I am the resurrection and the life."** (John 11:25)

God will restore. It may not happen the way we would want or expect, but He will do it in His perfect way and time.



There will come a day when **"The waste and desolate places will be even too small for its inhabitants."** (Isaiah 49:19).

We need to be prepared for expansion. One day we will look at all the amazing things God has done for us and will ask ourselves, almost in disbelief, "What is this? Who are these?" I was alone and grieving all my many losses, a lost wanderer, and now look at all the joy and blessing that God has filled my life with!

The Gentile Church plays a pivotal role in helping the Jewish people who remain in exile to come home to the Land of Israel (make aliyah).

**"Behold I will lift up my hand to the goyim (Gentiles) and my banner to the nations. They shall bring your sons and daughters back to the land."** (Isaiah 49:22)

Will you be part of this great move of God's Spirit to bring His people home to the Land He promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and their descendants in an everlasting covenant?

**"Behold, I am going to deal at that time with all your oppressors, I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will turn their shame into praise and renown in all the earth."** (Zephaniah 3:19)

**"At that time I will bring you in, even at the time when I gather you together; Indeed, I will give you renown and praise among all the peoples of the earth, When I restore your fortunes before your eyes," Says YHVH.**" (Zephaniah 3:20)

**"I will strengthen the house of Judah, and I will save the house of Joseph, and I will bring them back, because I have had compassion on them; and they will be as though I had not rejected them, for I am YHVH their Elohim and I will answer them."** (Zechariah 10:6)

**"I will whistle for them to gather them together, for I have redeemed them; and they will be as numerous as they were before."** (Zechariah 10:8)

**"When I scatter them among the peoples, they will remember me in far countries, and they with their children will live and come back."** (Ezekiel 11:16)

**"Therefore say, thus says YHVH Elohim; "I will even gather you from the people, and assemble you out of the countries where ye have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Yisrael." "** (Ezekiel 11:17)

### Ekev Study Questions

1. What is the relationship between our obedience to God's commandments as written in the Torah and God's blessings? What are some New Testament Scriptures to back up your answer?
2. How may we be blessed through our ancestors? Do you know of righteous ancestors in your lineage?
3. What are some of the meanings of the word Ekev?
4. What do you think about God's command to destroy or drive out the inhabitants of the land and to have no pity on them? Do you consider this to be relevant to the situation in Israel today? Why or why not? Discuss.
5. Has the Holy Spirit revealed to you any 'destructive elements' or 'cherem' that you need to remove from your life or your possessions?
6. Can you relate to the issue of unsanctified mercy? Is there a 'Jonah' in your boat? Has there ever been a time when you needed to demonstrate 'tough love' and turn a person over to the Lord? Share and discuss.
7. Can you remember a time of 'chastening' from the Lord which was painful but later yielded the fruits of righteousness?
8. How do you receive it when someone tries to correct you?
9. What is the Hebraic meaning of Eshet Chayil (Proverbs 31 woman)?
10. When God has blessed and prospered you, do you remember that it all comes from Him?
11. Have you ever felt abandoned by everyone including the Lord? Did you experience His comfort after a loss? How did God show His presence, love and comfort to you?
12. How does Israel stand as a beacon of hope to the entire world?

About the Author:

Hannah Neshar grew up in an Orthodox Jewish home and received her education in a religious Hebrew school in Canada. During a crisis pregnancy, she came to know Jesus (Yeshua) as her Messiah and Savior. She now lives in Israel with her children and grandchildren, teaching the Jewish roots of the Christian faith.

**If you appreciate these teachings, your donations are greatly appreciated. It is through your generous financial and prayer support that we can continue to send the Word forth from Zion and Jerusalem (Isaiah 2:3).**

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