Parasha Mattot-Massei

וַיִּקַּח קֹרַח בֶּן-יִצְהָר בֶּן-קְהָת בֶּן-לֵוִי וְדָתָן וַאֲבִירָם בְּנֵי אֱלִיאָב וְאוֹן בֶּן-פֶּלֶת בְּנֵי רְאוּבֵן: וַיָּקֻמוּ לִפְנֵי מֹשֶׁה וַאֲנָשִׁים מִבְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל...

This week's Parasha is Mattot/Massei. It is a double Portion. Mattot means Tribes. It speaks of men and women making vows, taking revenge on Midian, and the settling of Reuben and Gad on the east side of the Jordan. Massei means Stages, and it describes the places the Israelites camped in their wilderness journeys, boundaries of the land, a list of the tribal chiefs, cities of refuge, and marriage of female heirs. There is a wealth of material from which to build a sermon in these seven chapters, however, I will be talking about current events with just a nod to the cities of refuge. Over the years, several prominent pastors have publicly admitted to or been exposed for serious moral or legal failures, leading to resignations, legal consequences, or public disgrace. Ted Haggard – Once a leading evangelical preacher; Jim Bakker – Founder of Praise the Lord Ministries; Bill Gothard – Pastor of the Gothard Institute; Tony Alamo – A former pastor sentenced to 175 years in prison for pedophilia; Creflo Dollar – Pastor of World Changers Church; Paul Jennings Hill – A pro-life pastor who shot and killed an abortion doctor; Andy Savage – Pastor who admitted to sexually assaulting a woman; Jimmy Swaggart, Bill Hybels, James MacDonald, Bruxy Cavey, Carl Lentz, Brian Houston, Mike Bickle, on and on... It is an understandable question when you consider the following verse in Hebrews. In light of all these men's utter failures, the question arises, have they forfeited their salvation beyond any hope of recovery? Hebrews 6:4-6, *For it is impossible for those who once were enlightened—having tasted of the heavenly gift and become partakers of the Ruach ha-Kodesh, and having tasted the good word of God and the powers of the olam ha'ba, and then having fallen away, to renew again to repentance, since they are again crucifying Ben-Elohim for themselves and publicly disgracing Him*. This passage has given many backsliders industrial grade heartburn. They ask, "will God take me back? Is God's mercy big enough to forgive my sins? Am I forever lost? Spoiler alert! The answer is all throughout scripture. It should be no mystery. Absolutely yes! God will forgive and restore. Look at what HaShem said to Israel through His prophet Jeremiah. Jeremiah 3:22, *"Return, backsliding children! I will heal your backsliding."* This passage is not unique in the Bible. The book of Judges the people of Israel go through a cycle of sin, repentance and restoration followed by sin, repentance and restoration. It seems there is no limit to God's mercy. (I said seems) Yet, I think of Peters words in 2 Peter 3:9*, Adonai is not slow in keeping His promise, as some consider slowness. Rather, He is being patient toward you—not wanting anyone to perish, but for all to come to repentance.*

In this parasha of vows and oaths, what about your vow and oath to serve the God of Israel? Consider for a moment the triad of parables in Luke 15.

There's the parable of the lost sheep where the shepherd leaves the flock in a safe place and goes out to find the one lost one. Why does he do that? He still has 99 sheep. What's one more? Because as a good shepherd he was not willing for even one to perish. The second parable is about a woman who loses a coin in her home. She lights a lamp and sweeps the house searching high and low until she finds it. Even though she has 9 other coins, that one was important enough that she called her friends and neighbors together to rejoice with her in finding her lost coin. Why? Because she was not willing to forgo the loss of just one coin. Yeshua said, *"In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."* And finally, there is the story of the prodigal son. We all know this famous story of the younger son who doesn't want to wait around for his 1/3 of the estate. (Remember the firstborn gets a double portion). He asked his father for his portion now. The father gave him his portion, and the lad went out and spent much of his inheritance on wine, women and song. The rest of it he wasted. At the end of the adventure, broke, tired, and hungry he realized that the servants in his father's household were better off than he was currently residing in a pig pen. He determined in himself to go back home and beg forgiveness and resign himself to servanthood. His father never got over losing his son. Each day he scanned the countryside in the hope that his son would someday reappear. That father never gave up on his son. There was always mercy and forgiveness in his heart. When the son showed up, the father was overjoyed and held a celebration. Nothing the son did could drive a wedge between him and his father that was big enough to break the relationship. These three stories illustrate why we are encouraged to pray for those who have fallen and help them find their way back to Hashem. Yeshua's brother, Yaacov (James) said it like this. James 5:19-20 says, *My brothers and sisters, if any among you strays from the truth and someone turns him back, let him know that the one who turns a sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.*

It is true that some people blaspheme the Spirit, a sin for which there is no forgiveness as seen in Mark 3:22-30 are turned to a reprobate? Yes, but people who harden their hearts to that degree will have neither the thought nor the desire to repent. They have utterly rejected God. John also speaks about a sin the leads to death, writing, 1 John 5:16-17, *If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he should ask, and God will give life to those who commit sin not leading to death. There is a sin leading to death—I am not saying you should ask about that. All unrighteousness is sin, but there is sin not leading to death.* What, exactly, does John have in mind? There is debate about what kind of death John speaks of, physical or spiritual. It might be safest to say that, in the event that we see someone cross the point of no return, their rejection of the Lord will be so final and ultimate that we will sense the futility of praying for them.

But, to repeat, from the beginning to the end of the Bible, there are calls for backsliders to repent, with an offer of mercy for those who return. Yeshua died for those sins too. Then what are we to make of Hebrews 6:4-6? It's important that we remember that Hebrews was written to Jewish followers of Yeshua. For them, apostasy from the faith could mean a return to Jewish faith without Yeshua, a return to the Temple-based sacrifice system, a return to repentance without the Mashiach's blood. Rav Sha'ul appears to be telling them that, as long as they remain in that state, there is no repentance for them. As rendered in the TLV, *4-6 For it is impossible for those who once were enlightened—having tasted of the heavenly gift and become partakers of the Ruach ha-Kodesh, and having tasted the good word of God and the powers of the olam ha'ba, and then having fallen away—to renew again to repentance, since they are again crucifying Ben-Elohim for themselves and publicly disgracing Him."* By denying Yeshua as their Mashiach and going back to their sacrificial Judaism, they were crucifying Him all over again. And to the extent that they did this openly, they exposed Him to public ridicule. Although they thought they could find repentance in their Jewish traditions without the Mashiach, they were sadly, fatally wrong. So, what is the bottom line? Can a person who denies Yeshua return to the Lord? I believe that if a person is truly repentant and turns away from his sin and apostacy, the Father will run towards him and embrace him saying *"For this son of mine was dead and has come back to life, he was lost and is found!"* Perhaps you feel like you have slipped away. Satan has told you that you cannot come back to the Lord. He's a liar. The Father is on the throne of heaven just waiting for you to repent and return to Him. Remember, God is not willing for anyone to perish. He wants everyone to be saved. He manifested in flesh to die for the world, not just a part of the world, but the whole world' Jew and Gentile.

Someone once said to me... "I would like for you to prove to me that we aren't saved. Thank you!" First I said this... I don't expect everyone to agree with my stance on this... it is true I don't believe anyone is truly saved until.... Until what. Are you dead and in heaven? No... so you are not saved in that regard... Has Yeshua returned to take you (us) home to heaven? No... so we aren't saved in that regard... Rav Sha'ul (Paul) said to work out your salvation with fear and trembling... surely this is telling us that our salvation is a process and not a one-time prayer at an altar at 8 years old. I like to give this analogy... A house is on fire (the world) and we are stuck inside the burning house. Yeshua (the blessed firefighter) has come to rescue us (bring us salvation) and He comes and takes us out of the house (of sin, by His blood) when we cry for help (repent). So, we are saved?? No... the other things haven't happened, we haven't died and He hasn't come back. We are in the world, not of the world; in other words, we can still go back into the burning house (return to a life of sin) and then you are not "saved". You will die in your sin (the burning house). I do not believe "once saved always saved" as we can all return to the burning house and forsake Adonai.

It is true that “We all sin and come short of the glory of God” and hence our salvation is a work in progress... “praying without ceasing” (repenting/praising) and living a Torah observant/obedient lifestyle to the best of our ability. Sure, we will stumble but we must walk in the spirit and not after the flesh. Remember, Hell opens her mouth to contain all going there and narrow is the gate to Heaven. So many “so called believers” walking around sinning, living in a greasy grace from a repentance done at a young age or otherwise thinking they a “saved”. The word says all sin (unrepentant) will not enter heaven. So, I personally take to heart... the words of Rav Sha’ul; “work out (a process) your salvation with FEAR AND TREMBLING”. Yeshua doesn’t want a sinful whore for a bride... going on sinning and living in greasy grace is spitting in His face. We must not be deceived in thinking that everyone goes to heaven because “God is love”... People must know that He is also a God of judgment and wrath (read the book of Revelation). To think you can live like hell and go to heaven is an utter deception and pastors that preach such are accountable. Then I was asked; “What about the verse where we are sealed unto the Day of Repentance? Also, didn't Yeshua pay the bride price for us? And if we accept His bride price and work out our own salvation. Aren't we saved?” God is the Beginning and the End. It is my belief, He knows the end (predestiny) of everyone. He knows who will serve Him and who will not. It says in Ephesians 1:4, *“God chose us in Mashiach before the foundation of the world.”* And I chose with my own free will in faith in the biblical truth of election. It is through the Holy Spirit, and the teachings and guiding power provided by the Spirit, that we are sealed and confirmed until the day of redemption, complete and free from the corruption of sin and the grave.

But who said that was a one-time repentance prayer? He surely paid the bride price, yet it is for a REPENTANT AND PURE BRIDE... Not a harlot that claims to be the bride (saved). If we leave Him, (cheat on Him with the world (sin willfully)) then it’s on us. I have found that the hang up people have is they believe "once saved always saved" and nowhere is that found in scripture. So, we are "saved" (if that's the term you want to use) as long as we remain repentant and living an obedient life. Some feel that if you went away like David, that if you were truly saved He would bring you back to repentance. Hence, I say, if you fall away like David... learn from him... He repented and lived righteous afterwards. Too many people think it’s a one-time experience... they will be sadly mistaken and be cast into hell... I’m not condemning or judging, the word of God tells us this... Just because someone is a "good" person, and to church, doesn't make them saved. Hence my premise... until I am dead and in Heaven or He takes me up I am not saved... no one is...because you and I, can until then, fall away... just like a fool can run back into a burning house and perish. Back to my question... So, you think you’re saved? It isn’t as cut and dry as many preachers tell you it is...

Philippians 2:5 says, *"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Mashiach Yeshua."*
The mind is a powerful part of our body. Because if someone can get into your mind they can change you. Everything we do physically causes us to use our minds. Every action of movement that comes from us goes through our mind. Believe me the Advertisers know the way to your pocketbook is through your mind. They spend millions on advertising to get you interested in their product. Likewise, Satan wants to interest you in Sin but not telling you the end result of it. On the other hand, the Holy Spirit is given to us to deliver us from the power of sin. He often reminds us of scripture and lessons taught in the scripture, to help us, but we must listen. This is a warfare for your mind; 2 Corinthians 10:4-5 *(For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Mashiach;* A key word in this verse is "imaginations" our minds are capable of all kinds of imaginations or mind sets. I believe that a whole lot of us are still in the mind set of that old Temptations song, "It's just my imagination, running away with me." So therefore, I believe we need to test our minds.

We need to take a mind test. We need to test our minds for four things; to see if we have really lost our mind for Mashiach. If you still have a :
(1) A Doubtful Mind - Luke 12:29, *"So do not seek what you will eat and what you will drink, and do not keep worrying."* When Satan questioned Eve in the garden, he caused her to doubt. We read in Genesis 3:3, *God has said, "You shall not eat of it, neither shall you touch it, lest you die." "And the serpent said to the woman, You shall not surely die:"*
You see, Satan is the master liar and he will wreck your mind if you let him. He will distort your thought patterns and destroy your confidence in God. The Lie: God is against me. All your trouble is coming from God. He has let you down. You "imagine" that God is blessing others but not you. You become unhappy with your lot in life and blame God. Basically, you have listened to Satan's lie and begin to doubt God's love for you. We must Guard against a doubtful mind! In Matthew 14, Peter was walking on the water to come to Yeshua when he took his eyes off Yeshua and began to sink. Yeshua said to him "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" Keeping our eyes on Yeshua and being thankful for His blessings will help us to "keep the faith"
Test (2) A Blinded Mind - 2 Corinthians 4:3-4, *"But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Yeshua, who is the image of God, should shine unto them."* Minds are blinded by all kinds of Satan's lies, Evolution, Situational Ethics, cults, world religions. Young people in college are most susceptible, having not been through enough testing in life or not grounded in the Bible they become easy prey for the intellectualism offered by many unbelieving teachers.

Sometimes young people are sent off to war and experience horrible things in which Satan will blame God for not stopping. Sin can also blind your mind to the truth of God's word. Each sin is like a brick on a wall between you and God's truth. The eyes of your mind become blinded or blocked off from the truth (ex). The key to victory here is to be willing to come to the light. Let yourself be exposed to the light of the word of God. Then the image of God will shine to you and faith will be given to you.
Test (3) A Closed Mind - 2 Timothy 3:7 says, *"Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth."* Some will spend years in school, learning many unimportant things, none of which will bring lasting happiness. Their minds are closed to the truth because of sin. John 3:20 tells us, *"For everyone who does evil hates the light and does not come to the light, so that their deeds will not be exposed."* Sadly, the picture we see is of Yeshua standing outside trying to come into the closed mind through the closed door. Revelation 3:20 says, *"Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."* In order to understand the truth of Spiritual things one must first come to the Savior, confessing their sin and wanting Yeshua to come into their heart. Then the Spirit of God will become the teacher.
And lastly (4) A Reprobate Mind – Romans 1:28 says, *"And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient;"* What is a reprobate mind like? A reprobate mind has a vanishing conscience, a reprobate mind has no regrets over committed sins. Well, have you lost your mind for Yeshua? A reprobate mind has resentment towards Yeshua and His people and a reprobate mind is not sensitive to the conviction of the Holy Spirit. In other words, a reprobate mind willfully rejects Yeshua and the good news of the Gospel. It is indifferent to the witness of the body of Mashiach. The mind that is going in this direction is in much danger. Such people imagine new religions (cults), new theories that explain away the God they do not want to acknowledge (evolution), they not only are headed for hell, but will bring others with them, if they do not repent.

I want you to imagine a courtroom. The defendant has been given every opportunity. The evidence has been presented. The judge has extended grace, delay after delay. But finally, the gavel falls. The verdict is not "guilty", that came earlier. The verdict is abandonment. The judge steps down from the bench and leaves the courtroom. That is the reprobate mind. The Hebrew Scriptures speak of this. The Prophets warned of it. The Apostolic Writings confirm it. And today, we live in a world that proudly displays it as enlightenment. Let's examine further what a reprobate is? Chances are you have at least one or two on your prayer list. Reprobate appears about 8 times in the King James Version of the Bible. I'm going to read you four verses, from the King James version, that I believe paint a very clear picture of what a reprobate is. Jeremiah 6:30, *"Reprobate silver shall [men] call them, because Adonai has rejected them."*

Key emphasis is, they are rejected by God. Romans 1:28, *"And even as they did not like to retain God in [their] knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient;"* Here, they did not want to keep God in their knowledge, preferring a life of sin, so God gives them over to a reprobate mind. 2 Timothy 3:8, *"Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moshe, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith."* These two are called reprobates; who resist the truth, having corrupt minds because they have turned back from the faith. And Titus 1:16, *"They profess that they know God; but in works they deny [him], being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate."* Here are people who SAY they know God, but they don't believe Him or love Him enough to obey Him. These scriptures show a reprobate is, Rejected by God and Someone who HAD God in their knowledge but decided because they want a life of sin they did not want to retain God in their knowledge. Someone who retains God in their knowledge is someone who HAS God in their knowledge and keeps Him. Reprobates don't want to retain God in their knowledge. Why? Because they are sinning. And we don't want to think about God when we are sinning because it takes the fun out of the sin. A reprobate is someone with a corrupt mind who resists the truth of God. They resist the truth; they have turned back from the faith. So now they have corrupt minds. Their minds are no longer filled with the truth of God's Word so now corruption comes in. Also a reprobate is someone who professes to know God but whose works show they do NOT know God. They are disobedient and commit abominations. They say they know God, but their actions say they don't know Him or they don't love Him enough to obey Him. Bottom line, a reprobate is somebody who says they know God and talks like they know God but they don't live like they know God and they are sinning. Sometimes it's comical when you run into a reprobate and you talk about scripture because they want to critique you or preach at you even though their life and their thoughts are so very far from God. Let us not ever be found among their numbers.

Let us examine the Word of God, to see how lawlessness affect the majority of people since creation. Adam and Chavah (Eve) sinned and repented… Cain… well not so much and he was banished (a type of hell) and helped create a world full of sinners that God regretted creating. Hence, here comes punishment… The flood… How many in ALL the world were saved? EIGHT! Let's say there were only 20 million people in all the world then (there's 7.5 billion now)… that's so numerically insane! And you think you're special and rate as righteous as Noach? Well, let's jump ahead in Genesis and we see Lot, his wife and two daughters coming out of two cities (Sodom & Gomorrah) and let's say there are 20,000 in the cities combined… Four came out, one looked back, thinking she was saved and BAM, nope… so that 3 people of 20,000, that is a .015% chance of making it in those odds… Well that hardly seems fair eh?

Let's go to the book of Exodus… When the Israelites left Egypt in the exodus, there were *"about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children"* (Exodus 12:37). The "men on foot" number of 600,000 would have only included able-bodied, military-age men. The people of Israel had been living in Egypt for 430 years (Exodus 12:40). Moshe led the Israelites away from that land and scholars believe that the total number of Israelites who left Egypt during the exodus, women and children and old men included, was estimated to be around 2.4 million people. Now ask yourself how many of those 2.4 million made it to the Promised Land? The answer is 2, yep two… Joshua and Caleb, because they had believed and lived their lives for God. So, what are those odds? The probability is about 1 in 365,000. Again, a slight chance. While there are some horrible examples of salvation lost in the Bible; no mere human knows the likelihood of salvation. Only Yeshua knows and 2000 years ago He said that few will enter the narrow gates of paradise. We must therefore do as a Pharisee of Pharisees once told us. We read in Galatians 5:16-25*; ***But I say, walk by the Ruach, and you will not carry out the desires of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Ruach, but the Ruach sets its desire against the flesh—for these are in opposition to one another, so that you cannot do what you want. But if you are led by the Ruach, you are not under law. Now the deeds of the flesh are clear: sexual immorality, impurity, indecency, idolatry, witchcraft, hostility, strife, jealousy, rage, selfish ambition, dissension, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, just as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit God's kingdom.* **He said walk after the Spirit… not the flesh… and then gave examples of fleshly sin… seems pretty clear there are "laws" or "standards" to live by here… I know we are bound to fail for we are flesh, so Rabbi Sha'ul (Paul) also told us to "pray without ceasing", (Romans 12:12); This shows the way to 'rejoice always', to wit, incessant prayer, for he that has accustomed himself to hold conversation with God, and to give thanks to Him over everything that happens as happening well, will evidently have unbroken joy. Though a man cannot be incessantly praying in words, the mind may be held continuously in an attitude of prayer, even in sleep *(Song of Solomon 5:2)*. This prayer is to be "without ceasing," implying constancy *(Colossians 4:2)* and perseverance. This is not a mere precept capable of fulfillment in idea, rather than in fact; it is an exhortation to live in a devotional frame of mind. It is impossible to be always on our bended knees, but we may be in the spirit of prayer when engaged in the duties of our earthly calling. I have said many times being a believer isn't for sissies, but for those who really love the God of Israel. Given this information, logic dictates that one must live a holy life to make it into the top echelon of those desiring to become saved. This can only be done by living in accordance with all the teachings of the word of God and avoiding the common mistakes of setting one's own standards and aligning oneself with the prevailing sterilized and sexualized culture we live in during these modern times.**

Chazak, Chazak, ve'Nitchazek – Be Strong, Strong and we will be Strengthened

b'Shem Yeshua, haMelech v'haMashiach Shelanu! Amein.

("in the name of Yeshua, our King and the Mashiach! Amein.")