

# ISRAEL Teaching Letter

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**Righteousness**



**Peace**



**Joy**

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**Do you want more joy** in your life? Have you been longing for a deeper sense of peace? The Scriptures give us a clue of where to find both. In our Christian tradition we have the concept of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. It comes from Romans 14:17, which says, “*For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.*” It seems to be a progression with one leading to the next: Righteousness → Peace → Joy. If that is truly the case, and I believe it is, then the source of having more peace and joy in our lives is righteousness. How would that work in practical life? As we look at each of these key words, it should become apparent how the process works. Ready? Let’s dig deeper.

## Righteousness

We can define righteousness in several ways: goodness, justification, charity and so forth, but the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* gives a good summation: “The intention to be and do right.” We learn how to be and act correctly in God’s Word, the Bible. It is His owner’s manual for life, explaining to mankind how to live in right relationship with God and other people. Our verse from Romans 14 comes in the context of building community with other people of faith, not allowing our freedom to hinder others.

The Greek word commonly used for righteousness in the Writings of the Apostles (NT) is *dikaiosynē* (δικαιοσύνη). *Thayer’s Greek Lexicon* defines it as “right standing before God,” “virtue” and “correctness of thinking, feeling and acting.” Strong’s Concordance gives the Hebrew for righteousness as *tsedakah* (צדקה), which carries the same meaning as the Greek. Over time in Jewish culture, *tsedakah* was commonly equated with giving charity. This was the understanding that Jesus (Yeshua) had when He taught in Matthew 6:1, “Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven” (NASB). He goes on in the following verses to describe how one should correctly give charity.

It is interesting and helpful to understand what righteousness is, but why should we practice it in our daily lives? Isaiah 32:17 tells us the outcome of righteousness: “*The work of righteousness*

## Romans 14:17 comes in the context of building community with other people of faith.



*will be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever.”* The result in our lives of right living will be peace, both internal and external. When we do what is right, we have no need to fear man or God. We don’t have to keep looking over our shoulder, worried that someone we have offended is going to come after us. But when we do wrong, we are disciplined by a higher authority for a purpose. Hebrews 12:11 states, “*Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.*” The discipline is not joyful, but later those who learn from it receive the peaceable fruit of righteousness and joy in their lives.

When we love God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength and we love our neighbor as ourselves (Matt. 22:37–39, Mark 12:30–31), we will know peace.

# Peace

We often think of peace as an absence of conflict. But the biblical concept is so much more.

The Greek word commonly used for peace in the Writings of the Apostles (NT) is *eirēnē* (εἰρήνη). Thayer defines it as “security,” “harmony” and “prosperity.” The meaning of peace in Hebrew, *shalom* (שׁלוֹם), is deep and rich. *Strong’s Concordance* describes it as “safety,” “wholeness” and “rest.” How can we ensure this blessed state in our daily lives?

Psalms 119:165 (NASB) teaches that *“Those who love Your law have great peace, and nothing causes them to stumble.”* Do you want to have not only peace, but *great* peace in your life and stand securely? Then you need to love God’s Law (*Torah*, God’s instruction in Gen.–Deut.).

Jesus (Yeshua) clearly taught this principle when He said, *“Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock”* (Matt. 7:24–25).

Following God’s righteous guidelines in His Word brings peace and stability to our lives. Consider the example of wearing a seat belt. In many countries, wearing a seat belt is required by law. If you choose not to wear a seat belt in these countries, you will constantly be on the lookout for the police, knowing that if they see you, they will give you a fine. True, wearing a seat belt can feel restrictive or confining, but wearing it makes sense, even beyond the legal concern of having to pay a fine. We all know that in the event of a serious accident, seat belts are designed to save lives and reduce the risk of injury. It is the same with God’s guidelines for living. At times they can seem restrictive, hampering our ability to



**Like seat belts, God's guidelines keep us from hurting ourselves and others.**

do as we please. However, they keep us from hurting ourselves and others. Do we choose to follow God's rules over fear of His punishment, or do we choose to live righteously because of the freedom and peace it produces in our lives and relationships?




**Many of the most memorable moments in life have one trait in common: joy.**


## Joy

Many of the most memorable moments in life have one trait in common: joy. It permeates happy occasions, such as an accepted engagement proposal, a wedding or the birth of a new baby into the family. Hopefully everyone reading this has experienced that exhilarating feeling of pure, unbridled joy during life events. In Hebrew there are many words related to joy, as befits a people like the Jews who are known for their rejoicing. The word

most commonly used in the *Tanakh* (OT) for joy is *simcha* (שמחה), which Strong defines as “gladness,” “joy” or “mirth.” The Greek equivalent used in the Writings of the Apostles (NT) is *chara* (χαρά). Strong describes it as “cheerfulness,” “gladness” or “joy.”



When we are at peace internally and externally, we are free from worry. In life, one of the things that can rob us of joy is worry. When we are distracted by the cares of this world and are anxious about daily needs, it is nearly impossible to be joyful. It reminds me of Matthew 6, where necessities of life are listed along with the strong admonishment not to worry. In Matthew 6:25 Jesus (Yeshua) teaches, “*Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?*” He goes on in verse 33 to say, “*But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.*” Again, the Kingdom of God and His





## ***You are the light of the world. Matthew 5:14***

righteousness are foundational, just as we saw in Romans 12. We cannot serve two masters (Matt. 6:24). We must choose between the world and its cares or righteous service in God's Kingdom. Choosing the latter will produce peace, which in turn opens our hearts to joy. But we must intentionally work toward it and plan as Proverbs 12:20 (ESV) teaches, "*Deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil, but those who plan peace have joy.*" Those with a righteous heart who plan for peace will have joy.

### **For Now or the World to Come?**

Does this process of righteousness leading to peace and joy have relevance for our lives now, or is it only meant in a spiritual sense to be fully realized in the future? Early in our Christian tradition, the Church fathers renounced any political opposition to Rome. By and large, the Kingdom of God was spiritualized to refer to the world to come—a future reality that was unattainable in the here and now. And yet when we choose to follow God's path of righteousness, we bring His light of truth into the world. We expand His Kingdom now. He makes it clear throughout His Word that we are to make His truth known and bring glory to Him. One of my favorite examples is in Matthew 5:14–16,

where Jesus (Yeshua) taught, “*You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.*” Living our lives in the peace and joy that godly living produces is the greatest reflection of God’s character that we portray to the world, a world that is entrenched in ever increasing chaos and strife.

## God’s Plan All Along

In the book of Leviticus, God gives clear instructions about His festivals. Throughout the year they build on one another, providing set times for repentance, dedication and rejoicing. The festivals are God’s way of showing His profound desire to be in intimate relationship with mankind. Each festival prepares us to live in right relationship with God and other people. We begin in the spring with *Pesach* (Passover), the great reenactment

of God’s redemption of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage. It reminds us of our inability to free ourselves as we rely on God’s sovereignty. Next comes *Shavuot* (Pentecost), as we celebrate the giving of the *Torah* (God’s instruction in Gen.–Deut.) on Mount Sinai. How could we be in right relationship with God and others without the commandments? They are the very source of righteousness. The apostle Paul reminds us in Romans 7:7, “*I would not have known sin except through the law.*” So first God redeems, then He reveals His will. As we move through the year, the next festival is *Rosh Hashanah*, the Feast of Trumpets. The trumpet blasts remind us that God is coming to judge. Then, ten days later on *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement, He provided a way for the nation to repent and be at peace once again—with Himself and with each other. All of this leads up to the final great festival of *Sukkot* (Feast of Booths) on which God commands us to be altogether joyful (Deut. 16:13–15).

These are God’s festivals, appointed times throughout the year when He welcomes us to draw near to Him. Right



relationship with God by walking in His righteous commandments produces peace in our hearts, culminating in profound joy. Join in with God's plan. Righteousness, peace and joy will flow out of your life and bless others, bringing glory to God's name.

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Scripture is taken from the New King James Version, unless otherwise noted.

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#### TERMINOLOGY:

Many of our readers are seasoned supporters of Israel while others are just beginning to understand the importance of standing with God's chosen nation; some prefer the use of Hebrew names and terms, while others are comfortable with more traditional Christian terminology. Because we want to show respect to all of our readers while providing an enjoyable educational experience, we are making every effort to use both terms whenever possible. The following are some of the most common examples:

- Jesus (Yeshua)
- *Tanakh* (Old Testament or OT) – *Tanakh* is an acronym used in Judaism which stands for *Torah*, *Neviim* or Prophets and *Ketuvim* or Writings.
- Writings of the Apostles (New Testament or NT)
- *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.)

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