

VAYIGASH {וַיִּגַּשׁ} (And He Drew Near)

Genesis 44:18-47:27, Ezekiel 37:15-28, Luke 6:12-16

A Messianic Jewish Commentary

By Hannah Nesher www.voiceforisrael.net

“Then Judah came near (Vayigash) unto him {וַיִּגַּשׁ אֵלָיו יְהוֹשֻׁעַ} and said: “Pardon your servant, my lord, let me speak a word to my lord. Do not be angry with your servant, though you are equal to Pharaoh himself.” (Genesis 44:18)

In this week’s parashah, Vayigash, we continue with the story of Joseph, son of Jacob, in Egypt, beginning with Judah (*Yehudah*), pleading on behalf of his younger half-brother, Benjamin.

Judah offered to give his life as a ransom so that Benjamin would go free. Because a silver cup was found in Benjamin’s bag, (having been planted there deliberately by Joseph), Benjamin was in danger of having to remain a slave in Egypt while the other brothers returned to Egypt.



Joseph Converses with Judah, His Brother (watercolor circa 1896–1902 by James Tissot, Wikipedia)

Judah could not bear to return to his father without his youngest brother, Benjamin, therefore he pleaded, *“Now therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the lad as a slave to my lord, and let the lad go up with his brothers. For how shall I go up to my father if the lad is not with me, lest perhaps I see the evil that would come upon my father?”* (Genesis 44:33-34)

Acting as the spokesperson for all of the brothers, Judah confessed their sincere regret over the way they had sinned against Joseph in the past. This confession of sin, accompanied by sincere remorse fulfills the Torah’s requirements for true repentance (*tshuvah*).

Spirit of Self-Sacrifice – Laying Down our Lives...

Judah, by demonstrating a spirit of self-sacrifice akin to that of Yeshua the Messiah, became the leader of Israel’s only tribe that endures to this day. It is from this tribe of Judah (*Yehudah*) that

we derive the words ‘Jew’ and ‘Judaism’; and it is also from Judah that our Messiah - the ‘*lion of the tribe of Judah*’ - came forth.

“Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals." (Revelation 5:5)

Just as we hear in Judah’s plea to Joseph, we can discern this same spirit of self-sacrifice in the words of our Messiah: **“I am the good shepherd (Ro’e hatov). The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.”** (John 10:11)

Some anti-Semites have accused the Jews of crucifying Jesus but He makes it clear that no one took His life from Him; rather, He lay it down willingly. He offered Himself up as a sacrifice for us all. **“No one takes it (my life) from me, but I lay it down of Myself.”** (John 10: 17)

Both of these men (Yehudah and Yoseph) said, *“Take me instead!”* Yeshua said that there is no greater love than when someone lays down his life for a friend.¹

It seems to me, however, that there is a huge difference between being an unwilling victim; and having a truly self-sacrificing spirit. There are times when we make sacrifices on behalf of another person such as our child or spouse, and we are happy to do so, despite the cost, because there is a spirit of self-sacrifice in operation that sincerely desires to bless and help another.

There is a joy and satisfaction in paying the price, in spite of the pain or inconvenience because one sees the good it will yield in the future. Yeshua, *for the joy set before him*, endured the cross.² What mother (or father) begrudges getting up in the middle of the night to feed a hungry infant? For the joy of seeing a child grow up healthy, strong, and secure, most parents endure much in raising children.

There are times, however, when self-sacrifice seems to cross the line into a victim mentality. I know I have crossed the line when I begin to murmur, grumble, complain - feeling sorry for myself, used, abused, and taken advantage of. When I hear myself saying things like, *“I’m nothing more to you than an ATM machine!”* or, *“No one appreciates anything I do around here”* or how about this one, *“I’m a human being too, you know!”*, then I know that I have really crossed that line.

I need to step back and see if I can truly say, *‘No one is taking this from me’*. Am I making these sacrifices willingly? Or am I giving with bitterness and resentment; out of compulsion and obligation? The difference between the two is huge!

¹ John 15:13 paraphrase

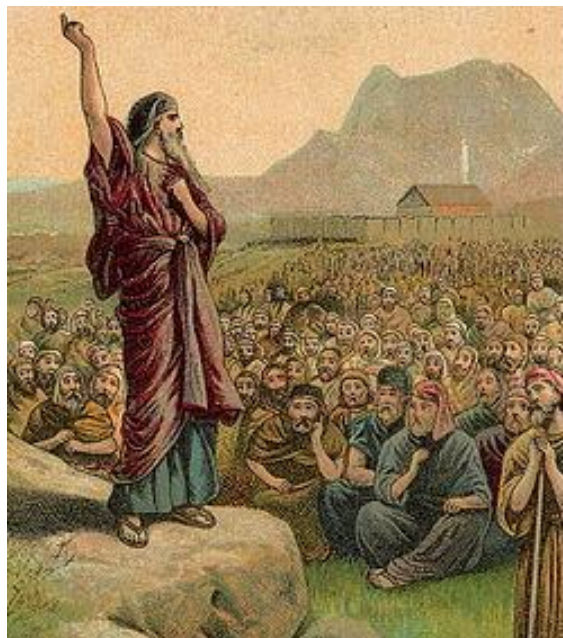
² Hebrews 12:2

Only the Holy Spirit can tell us when we have stopped helping and started enabling. If we will listen to the boundaries the Spirit of God instructs us to set, then we can live with joy and peace, even in the midst of ‘laying down our lives’ for another.

If it is our Father asking us to sacrifice, then He will also provide the grace and strength to obey Him; but far too often, we are doing things that God never even asked us to do. Because we therefore lack the grace to perform the sacrifice, it only produces frustration, anger and resentment. God says, “**My grace will be sufficient for you**”³; but this only applies if we are doing His will.

Moses is another great biblical figure who demonstrated a spirit of self sacrifice, but he also crossed the line. When God called him to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt, Moses endured much suffering at their hands. He even went so far as to ask God to blot his own name out of the book of Life, unless God forgave His people, Israel, for their sin of idolatry with the golden calf.⁴

And yet, later we see Moses toiling long, weary hours in a sacrificial effort to judge all their disputes. His father in law, Jethro (*Yitro*), wisely warned Moses that if he continued in such a foolish manner, he would wear himself out – and the people too.



Moses pleading with the Children of Israel, lithography from a Bible card published in 1907

We get cranky when we’ve pushed beyond sensible limits and get all worn out; and then we wear out everyone around us with our bad attitudes. What did Moses need to do? He needed to unload some of the heavy burden upon those qualified to share the load.

Maybe, if we’re feeling at the point of burn out, it might be wise to follow some of Yitro’s advice and unload some of the burden on those who should rightly be carrying a portion of the load. We need to get creative. Is there someone we could hire to do some of the tasks? Could we trade services? Or offer free room and board for some household help?

There may be people who would really like to be a part of what we are doing but we just haven’t asked. Instead of complaining about how tired and worn out we are and how we ‘*do all the work*

³ 2 Corinthians 12:9

⁴ Exodus 32:32

around here', we need to make some reasonable requests of others and/or find a team of people to help us before we wear ourselves out.

The apostle Paul also sacrificed himself for the sake of taking the gospel to the Gentiles; even as his heart yearned for the salvation of the Jews. He wished that he, himself, could be accursed if it would bring about the salvation of his brethren, the Jews.⁵

God may call us to make serious sacrifices for the sake of bringing His salvation to the ends of the earth, but the rewards will be well worth it. He promises that those who lose their lives for His sake will gain eternal life;⁶ that those who humble themselves will be exalted;⁷ and that those who leave father, mother, sisters, brothers, children, and houses and lands for the sake of the Kingdom of God will receive many times more in this present time, and in the age to come eternal life.⁸

Many believers, including ourselves, who have come home to the Land of Israel have made huge sacrifices – leaving behind beloved family and friends, as well as many earthly possessions. But if even one soul is saved by our presence in Israel, then it is well worth it!

A Great Reconciliation

Joseph, no longer able to control his emotions after seeing his brothers' repentance, cried out for everyone to leave except his brothers. He wanted to be alone with them when he revealed his true identity.

"Then Joseph could not restrain himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, "Make everyone go out from me!" So no one stood with him while Joseph made himself known to his brothers. And he wept aloud, and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard *it*." (Genesis 45:1-2)



Joseph identified by his brothers (1789 painting by [Charles Thévenin](#))

⁵ Romans 9:3

⁶ Luke 17:33

⁷ Luke 14:11

⁸ Luke 18:20-30

Why did Joseph order everyone else out of the room? We cannot really be intimate with someone with others watching. Yeshua wants to make Himself known to His brethren and to re-establish a close, personal, intimate relationship with them

Just as Joseph said, “*Ani Yoseph, (I am Joseph, your brother...)*” so will Yeshua one day say, “*I am Yeshua, your brother and Messiah.*” Halleluyah!

Joseph no longer spoke in the Egyptian tongue through an interpreter. He now spoke directly to his brothers in Hebrew. So, too, will all the foreignness of a ‘*Gentile Jesus*’ dissipate as Yeshua speaks to His Jewish brethren in their own language.

Joseph’s response to his brothers is nothing short of amazing! Here is a man who experienced terrible betrayal, injustice and pain at the hands of his brothers and yet what does he say to them? Does he say, “*How could you have done this to me!?*” or “*It’s payback time – now I will receive vengeance by punishing you!*”

No, no, absolutely not! Joseph’s first concern was to alleviate his brothers’ tormenting guilt and remorse over their crimes against him.



Joseph Forgives His Brothers (illustration from a Bible card published 1907 by the Providence Lithograph Company)

“And now be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that you sold me here; for God did send me before to preserve life...” (Genesis 45:5)

There are some who believe that God is angry with the Jews for rejecting His son and that all the evil that has befallen the Jewish people is a sign of God’s curse upon them. They believe that God has rejected Israel as His covenant people and that He has replaced them with another – the Christian Church. This false doctrine, called ‘Replacement Theology’, is blown apart by the account of Joseph’s gracious response to his brothers.

Yeshua is not angry with His Jewish brethren for rejecting Him, betraying Him, selling him for silver, or even for crucifying Him. NO, He is longing to be good to them and to be reconciled with them.

I truly believe with all my heart that when Yeshua returns, and when the Jewish people recognize Him and mourn for Him, the One they pierced, as the prophet Zechariah tells us will

happen⁹; that Yeshua's response to their remorse will be the same. He will say, *"Do not be grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that you sold me and consented to my crucifixion, for this was all part of God's plan – for the salvation of many people - including the Gentiles."*

Joseph did not only save his own family, but also the Egyptians. So too, did Yeshua come, not only for the House of Israel, but as Savior for people of every tongue, tribe, and nation of the earth. Isaiah said of God's servant, the Messiah, that it would be too small a mission for Him to raise up only the tribes of Jacob, but that He would bring salvation (Yeshua) to the ends of the earth!¹⁰

This is made clear in the book of Romans where Paul revealed this mystery to the Church. Paul set the record straight:

Joseph and His Brethren Welcomed by Pharaoh (watercolor circa 1896–1902 by [James Tissot](#))



"I say, then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not!"¹¹ I say, then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! Or in Hebrew we would say "Has v'halilah!"

But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles...For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved...as it is written: The Deliverer will come out of Zion." (Romans 11:11,25-26)

Isn't it wonderful to see in Scripture that God still has a hope and a future for His people Israel, and that He is not angry with them? When the Jewish people recognize Yeshua as their Messiah, there will also be a great reconciliation which will ultimately result in life from the dead.

"For if their being cast away *is* the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?" (Romans 11:15)

⁹ Zech. 12:10

¹⁰ Isaiah 49:6

¹¹ Romans 11:1)

Do not be Grieved or Angry with Yourself

I think it is important to understand the theology of Scripture and God's end time purposes for Israel and the nations, but we cannot stop here. God's Word is also a personal message for each one of us this very day in our own private lives.

I have been reading and studying the Word of God for over two decades now, but this year, God spoke something new to me from this portion of the parashah. When I read Joseph's words to his brothers, I felt the Lord speak these words personally, as a very dear friend, to my heart. *"Don't be grieved or angry with yourself, Hannah, for the things you've done that you now regret. Stop being mad at yourself! Be released from guilt and condemnation. For even these things I can work for the greater good of everyone. I can fit even this into My redemptive plans and purposes."*

Yeshua calls us His friends. We are not just 'servants' to Him, but cherished friends. I believe He wants us to be released from the torment of guilt and condemnation over things we have done in the past that may have hurt or wronged others.

Now I am not saying that we should just go around sinning against people lightly and not caring about the pain we have inflicted on another person. But when we have faced it, confessed it, and repented of it, and even attempted to make restitution as best as we can, then we must find the grace to receive forgiveness and move on.

What's done is done. We may not have thrown someone into a pit or sold him or her into slavery, but which one of us has not inadvertently or even purposefully pushed someone into a pit of sorrow or despair through our wrongful actions? Which one of us has not at some point in our lives betrayed someone's trust in us?

Maybe I am speaking only for myself, but it seems to me that there is no one without sin who could cast the first stone. I believe this is God's 'mo'ed' – His appointed hour - to say, *"Be set free from the guilt, remorse, shame, and condemnation."*

Yeshua came on a mission *to set the captives free and heal the broken hearted*. When we are struggling with guilt and condemnation, we cannot live freely and wholeheartedly. We are tormented and fragmented – tossed to and fro on the winds and waves of life.

With this kind of a mindset, any kind of 'storm' or trial that comes into our lives can be misinterpreted as a 'punishment from God'. It can become almost impossible for us to draw near to God or to live life with zestful joy and confidence with a guilty conscience.

How do I know this so well? It is because after returning to Israel, I struggled with feelings of guilt and condemnation - that I left my parents, beloved family members and dear friends

behind....that my husband was denied entry into the country....that I ‘made it’ while others didn’t - perhaps a kind of ‘*survivor’s guilt*’.

Maybe it is a case of an overly sensitive conscience, and maybe not; but I really hate seeing anyone suffer or be in pain, especially when I am involved. Perhaps others may also have experienced the torment of living with guilt and condemnation. If so, then you will also know that it is exhausting!! It drains us of our emotional energy that needs to go into living an abundant life as a child of God.

We may have trouble sleeping, or we become short tempered with people. I am so thankful that God has finally brought me to a place of cleansing and acceptance of forgiveness – both from God and from the people I have caused sorrow in the process of returning to the Land of Israel.

God’s word promises that if we will confess our sins, He is faithful and just, not only to forgive us of these sins, but also to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.¹² What happens when we cleanse something? Simple - it is clean... not dirty anymore. Though our sins may be as scarlet, we can be white as snow through the precious blood of Yeshua.¹³

I believe this is a ‘*word in due season*’ for someone. God is not mad at us and we need to stop being mad at ourselves – stop being grieved and angry with ourselves all the time. Let us take hold of the cleansing power of the blood of Yeshua to forgive us our sins; shake off the past, release this burden of guilt and condemnation - and forgetting those things which lie behind-press on with renewed hope and confidence in God for our present and future – kadima!¹⁴

When Jacob was told that his son was still alive, he found it unbelievable! “And they told him, saying, “Joseph is still alive, and he is governor over all the land of Egypt.” **And Jacob’s heart stood still, because he did not believe them.**” (Genesis 45:26)

Similarly, Yeshua was thought to be dead and was later discovered walking around alive and well in the Galilee. His disciples were also shocked! “**When they heard that Jesus was alive and that she had seen him, they did not believe it.**” (Mark 16:11)

Joseph invited his father and all his brothers into exile to save them from the famine in Israel, and God assured Jacob to accept his offer, even though it would mean four hundred years of brutal slavery for Jacob’s descendants.

“Then God spoke to Israel in the visions of the night, and said, “Jacob, Jacob!” And he said, “Here I am.” So He said, “I am God, the God of your father; do not fear to go down to Egypt,

¹² 1 John 1:9

¹³ See article, I’m Sorry But... on website: www.voiceforisrael.net/articles

¹⁴ Philippians 3:13, Kadima –a battle cry meaning ‘onward’!

for I will make of you a great nation there. I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also surely bring you up again; and Joseph will put his hand on your eyes.” (Genesis 46:2-4)

We can see that earlier, God instructed Jacob’s father, Isaac, to stay in the land during a famine; but in this instance God told Jacob to leave. This shows us how important it is that we listen for God’s voice and obey rather than simply going with whatever decisions that seem right to us.

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.” (Proverbs 3:5-6)



Joseph Presents His Father and Brothers to the Pharaoh (1515 painting by [Francesco Granacci](#))

Then Joseph brought his father and all his brothers to Egypt where he provided for them: **“Then Joseph provided his father, his brothers, and all his father’s household with bread, according to the number in their families.”** (Genesis 47:12)

Yeshua called himself ‘*living bread*’ (lechem chayim) and was born in Beit-Lechem, the house of bread. The bread that Joseph provided for his brothers sustained them in this lifetime; but the bread that Yeshua gives us provides life eternally.

“I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.” (John 6:51)

The theme of this wonderful story of Joseph’s reconciliation with his brothers, after so many years of being separated, continues in the haftarah with the reunion of the Northern and Southern tribes of Israel upon their return from exile.

Haftorah Vayigash - Unity

“How good and how pleasant it is when brethren dwell in unity.” (Psalm 133)

This week’s haftorah is so exciting! It describes another great reconciliation that will take place between brothers. It is a tremendous unity that is being restored in part now, and in its fullness in the future, between the tribes of Judah (Yehudah) and the tribes of Joseph (Ephraim).

The prophet Ezekiel foresaw a future when the stick of Judah and the stick of Joseph would be one in God’s hand.¹⁵ My apologies to history buffs everywhere, but I must confess that I don’t really enjoy studying history. Here, however, we cannot fully comprehend this prophecy unless we understand some of the history of ancient Israel.

After the reign of King Solomon, the nation of Israel split into the Southern Kingdom (represented by the tribe of Judah & Benjamin) and the Northern Kingdom (represented by the other ten tribes called Joseph, Ephraim, or simply Israel). **Kingdom of Judah** (light green) and **Kingdom of Israel** (dark green) circa 830 B.C.E.



While both kingdoms sinned, Judah (Yehudah) returned from Babylonian exile, and still exist today as the ‘*Yehudim*’ (Jews) while the ten Northern Tribes were ‘*lost*’ among the nations.

Because of their idolatry, God broke the bonds of brotherhood between Judah and Joseph (Israel). **“Then I cut in two my other staff, bonds, that I might break the brotherhood between Judah and Israel.”** (Zechariah. 11:14)

According to Jewish thought, the animosity between Joseph and his brothers (sons of Jacob) foreshadows this later split between the tribes of Israel.¹⁶ In an amazing prophecy, however, God promised that one day, these two kingdoms would be restored and become ‘*one*’ in His hand.

This word for one in Hebrew is **‘echad’**, **אֶחָד** as in the way a man and a woman will become ‘*basar echad*’ (one flesh). It doesn’t mean they will become one and the same person, but they will co-exist in unity and harmony.

¹⁵ Ezekiel 37:16-17

¹⁶ Joe Bobker, Torah with twist of humor, p. 113

“Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel his companions; and I will put them unto him together with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they shall be one in My hand.” (Ezekiel 37:19)

Becoming ‘echad’ is a powerful thing! Yeshua said that He and His Father are ‘echad’.¹⁷ Unity is not only good and pleasant but is also the place where God says He will command His blessing.¹⁸ *“Hinei matov u’manayim, shevet achim b’yachad”*

If we want to stay in the place of God’s blessing, we need to find a way of living in unity and harmony with people. If at all possible, Scripture says, as much as it depends upon us, we are to live at peace with all people. (Romans 12:18)

This is why the enemy tries so hard to cause strife and bring division between people, especially between husband and wife and among children and their parents. Rabbinic tradition says that a true marriage is an even greater miracle than the parting of the Red Sea - because the miracle that Moses performed by the Hand of God was still division, but the melding of two people into ‘echad’ (one) to live in unity and harmony with one another is an even greater miracle!

Ezekiel had a vision of unity between the children of God. He peeked into the spiritual realm and caught a glimpse of an awesome day when God would gather His children from all nations and bring them back to dwell in their own land: **“Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the nations, where they are gone and will gather them on every side and bring them into their own land;”** (Ezekiel 37: 21)

How exciting it is to be living in a day of seeing prophecy fulfilled before our very eyes as the Jewish people are returning home to Israel from all four corners of the earth; and how thrilling it is to be part of the ingathering of the exiles!

But this is only part of what God promises He will do; for only Judah is at this time being re-gathered. Only the Jewish people are returning to the Land of Israel. We have yet to see the fulfillment of the prophecy by which Joseph (Ephraim) will also come home - becoming one (echad) with us to rebuild this land.

How I wish I could say to all those of Ephraim, whose hearts yearn to also come to dwell in this Land, “Bo’u – come!” But for now, the door has not been fully opened.

One day this will happen. Yeshua said, **“And other sheep I have which are not of this fold. Them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice, and there will be one flock and one shepherd.”** (John 10:16)

¹⁷ John 10:30

¹⁸ Psalm 133

Joseph, in marrying an Egyptian wife and having Egyptian children, represents Gentiles who have been grafted into the Olive tree and have become part of the commonwealth of Israel through the blood of Yeshua.¹⁹

Through Yeshua's sacrificial death on the cross, the dividing wall between Jew and Gentile has been destroyed, resulting in 'one new man' out of the two. This is the greatest reconciliation of all! God's purposes are to reconcile us to Himself and to one another.²⁰

"For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself **one new man** from the two, thus making peace (shalom), and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity." (Ephesians 2:14-16)

One day the Spirit of God (*Ruach Elohim*) will blow upon this Land, opening the door for Joseph (Ephraim) to return also; and we will dwell together in unity under one King – that is King Messiah Yeshua! Halleluyah!

"Sing and rejoice O daughter of Zion! For behold, I am coming and I will dwell in your midst," says the Lord. Many nations²¹ shall be joined to the Lord in that day, and they shall become My people." (Zechariah 2:10-11)

One glorious day, God will make us one nation in the land, upon the mountains of Israel, and one King shall be king to us; and we shall be no more two nations, neither shall we be divided into two kingdoms any more at all..." (Ezekiel 37:22) Wow!

And if this were not enough, not only is God going to bring back and restore the Kingdom of Israel under the Messiah, son of David, but He is also preparing to cleanse His people from all idolatry and all uncleanness.

"And My servant David shall be king over them, and they all shall have one shepherd; they shall also walk in Mine ordinances, and observe My statutes, and do them. And they shall dwell in the land that I have given unto Jacob My servant, wherein your fathers dwelt; and they shall dwell therein, they, and their children, and their children's children, forever; and David My servant shall be their prince forever." (Ezekiel 37:24)

¹⁹ Romans 11:17, Ephesians 2:11-19

²⁰ Unity in the Messiah, One flock & one shepherd, is a DVD on this topic. It may be ordered through our website: www.voiceforisrael.net or by mail

²¹ The word nations is translated in Hebrew to read 'Goyim rabim' which means 'many Gentiles'

We shall dwell with God in our midst, in an everlasting covenant of peace. Not only will we experience a national restoration of Israel, but also a spiritual regeneration of all God's people. This will be the greatest miracle – Israel united and reconciled to God and one another - Judah and Joseph dwelling together as one (echad) in this land. Come Adonai Yeshua....

“I will strengthen the house of Judah and I will save the house of Joseph. I will bring them back, because I have mercy on them. They shall be as though I had not cast them aside....”
(Zechariah 10:6)

About the Author:

Hannah Nesher 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.

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