

VAYESHEV { וַיֵּשֶׁב } (And He Settled)

Genesis 37:1-40:23, Amos 2:6-3:8, Matthew 1:1-6, 16-25

A Messianic Jewish Commentary by Hannah Nesher

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Shalom beloved and greetings from the Land of Israel. Welcome to this week's Torah Study: **“For out of Zion shall go forth the Torah and the Word of Adonai from Jerusalem.”** (Isaiah 2:3)

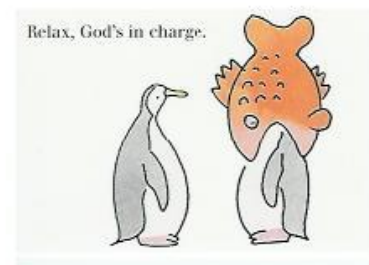
“Jacob lived in the land where his father had stayed, the land of Canaan.” (Genesis 37:1)

In last week's Torah study, Jacob returned from Haran with his entire household to settle in the Land of Canaan. After all the twists and turns of Jacob's life he finally wanted to *'settle down'*. The original Hebrew uses the word, **‘yeshev’ יָשַׁב**, which means *'to settle or to live'*. In Israel, a settlement is called a *'yishuv'*; and those who settle in territories occupied by a majority of Palestinians often come under heavy fire – both from misguided, anti-Zionist critics as well as from Palestinian terrorists living nearby. Let's keep the descendants of Jacob who also *'settle'* in this Land in our prayers.

Through an encounter with a Divine Being, Jacob's name was changed to Israel (from Yaacov to Yisrael); and in this parashah, we learn about the trials of Jacob's favorite son, Joseph. I especially love this week's study from the Word of God because through the story of Joseph, we are reminded of the sovereignty of God who still governs the affairs of man and is guiding our every footstep.

My sister once gave me one of those cute *'pass it on'* cards with a picture of a penguin standing there with his head entirely swallowed up into the mouth of a big fish. The caption reads, **‘Relax! God's in charge’**.

Sometimes doesn't it seem like this is our life? We are totally in the dark about why these strange and fiery trials are happening to us. If there seems to be a light at the end of this long, dark, tunnel, we are certain it must be a train coming to run us over! ☺



At times we feel engulfed by confusion and chaos, and yet we want to believe, deep in our soul, that yes, God is still in control, even here and even now in these challenging circumstances of our life.

I am quite certain that Joseph must have felt similar emotions on his tumultuous journey toward his great destiny. As the favored (perhaps spoiled?) son of his father, Joseph was thrown into a pit by his very own brothers and sold into slavery in Egypt.

And then, just when we think it couldn't get worse..... Joseph resisted temptation from Potiphar's wife, did the right thing, honored God, and ended up- - what? Better off? Rewarded? Oh no – just the opposite – he ended up thrown into prison for a crime he did not commit and forgotten there for year after dismal year. Oye vey!

God is in control here? Yes, we will see at the end of the story, as Joseph also came to realize, that God is most definitely in control.

Bickering Brothers

“Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his sons, because he was the son of his old age; and he made him a varicolored tunic.” (Genesis 37:3)

Israel, as Jacob is now called, loved Joseph, the only son of his beloved wife, Rachel, more than any of his other sons. He made no secret of his favoritism, and openly gave Joseph a special tunic, called a *ketonet passim* כֶּתֶנֶת פָּסִים - which means a ‘*striped shirt or tunic*’. In the Patriarchal Age, a Semitic chief would wear such a coat as an insignia of rulership.

Jacob, in giving Joseph this special tunic, must have known of his son's pre-determined calling to leadership; and he therefore marked Joseph for future chieftainship of the tribes of Israel after his father's death.

This blatant display of favoritism created a huge problem in Jacob's family: **“But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peaceably to him.” (Genesis 37:4)**



Jacob blesses Joseph and gives him the coat

We would think that Jacob would have recognized the negative effects of favoritism from his own mother and father: Isaac favored Esau and Rebecca favored Jacob. Rather than learn from his parent's mistakes, however, Jacob simply perpetuated his parents' weaknesses. We also have a choice - to either learn from our parents' faults and decide to parent differently, or to carry on

with the dysfunctional parent-child relationships that have been modeled for us by previous generations.

Sibling rivalry can be a serious problem in families. The other day, there was a silly episode on TV called '*Bickering Brothers*'. These two half-brothers just couldn't seem to get along and they bickered constantly. Sure, it may be funny on TV, but in real life, in our own homes, there is nothing funny about it! Can any parents relate? 😊

Sometimes I feel like there is nothing worse than bickering brothers (or sisters). I know, I know, I have been told over and over again that sibling rivalry is normal and unavoidable but I still have trouble accepting the bickering, arguing and squabbling that seems to occur between siblings, often over such petty issues.

If I allow it, this kind of chronic strife in my home and family can really sour my disposition and steal my joy, my peace and even sometimes my hope. How, then, do we deal with it? Do we just ignore it? I don't think this is wise, since we can see from Cain and Abel as well as the story of Joseph that hatred and jealousy between siblings can even result in murder.

The Bible warns us that if we hate our brother, even just in our heart, we are guilty of murder and forfeit eternal life: **"Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him."** (1 John 3:15)

Perhaps we can use the story of Joseph as well as other Scripture passages to teach our children the dangers of hating and envying our brothers and sisters. This sin can cause people to walk in darkness and not in the Light that our God has called us to. Hatred for a brother or sister, whether in our natural families or in the Body of Messiah, can actually blind us to the extent that we lose our direction in life. ¹

We cannot claim to love God, who is invisible, while at the same time hating a brother or sister whom we can actually see: **"Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen."** (1 John 4:20) Therefore, let us love one another.

Joseph the Dreamer

We see that Joseph most definitely had a special destiny; indeed, Jacob's favored son is allotted more text in the Bible than any other character except Moses. The Jewish mystical term associated with Joseph's Hebrew name, Yoseph, is '*Yesod*', meaning foundation, from the expression, "*Tzadik yesod olam*" – '*a righteous man is the foundation of the world*'.

¹ 1 John 2:9,11

Joseph dreamed two prophetic dreams that foretold his destiny to rule and reign over his brothers; but by relating his grandiose dreams to his brothers, Joseph only added fuel to the fire of their terrible jealousy, which had already been aroused by their father's favoritism.

“Now Joseph had a dream, and he told it to his brothers; and they hated him even more.”
(Genesis 37:5)

In his first dream, Joseph saw a vision of all his brothers' sheaves of wheat bowing down to his: **“There we were, binding sheaves in the field. Then behold, my sheaf arose and also stood upright; and indeed your sheaves stood all around and bowed down to my sheaf.”** (Genesis 37:7)

The next prophetic dream similarly showed Joseph's future dominion over his brothers and even over his own mother and father. The sun, moon and eleven stars bowed down to Joseph. At this point, not only were his brothers indignant at what we might call his *'chutzpah'* (roughly translated *'cheeky nerve'*), but his father also rebuked him:

“So he told it to his father and his brothers; and his father rebuked him and said to him, “What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall your mother and I and your brothers indeed come to bow down to the earth before you?” (Genesis 37:10)



Joseph's dreams of sheaves & stars

The fact that Joseph obviously had a spiritual gift of prophecy and interpreting dreams comes into play when Pharaoh dreams a dream. We can also see these dreams as being relevant to the Messiah and His Jewish brethren even today, as will be explored later in this parashah.

Joseph, at the young age of seventeen, did not yet possess the wisdom to refrain from 'boasting' about his dreams to his brothers. It seems that Joseph, in his youthful pride and zeal, needed some 'preparation' in order to occupy that position of leadership for which he was destined; he needed a few more spins on the potter's wheel to rub off some of those rough edges. Before fulfilling his divine purpose, Joseph needed to learn humility; and this he gained through painful and difficult trials.

We may also have big dreams for our life, but it is not always wise to share them prematurely, even to those closest to us. We may also need to endure many challenging situations in life as we journey toward fulfilling our calling in God.

When Joseph came on a mission to check on his brothers, they plotted against him, intending to kill him. Their plan almost succeeded except for the protests of Reuven, who urged his brothers to instead throw Joseph into a pit (secretly intending to rescue Joseph later). During his time in the pit, Joseph became a **‘Prophet In Training’** P.I.T. He needed to undergo the fires of purification in order to be refined into a vessel God could use.



Joseph's Brothers Sell Him into Captivity (1855 painting by [Konstantin Flavitsky](#))

We can also think about this the next time we find ourselves stuck in the miry clay of a deep, dark pit – either having been pushed in by others – or by our own mistakes. We are not forgotten by God; we are simply prophets in training, being prepared for our destiny.

“He brought me up out of the pit of destruction, out of the miry clay; and He set my feet upon a rock making my footsteps firm.” (Psalm 40:2)

Reuven never did have the opportunity to save his brother, however, since while he was away, the other brothers sold Joseph to an Ishmaelite travelling caravan.

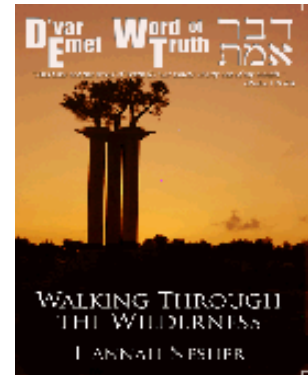
“They sold Joseph for twenty pieces of silver to the Ishmaelites...” (Genesis 37:28)

Eventually, Joseph ended up being sold in turn to an Egyptian named Potiphar, who soon discovered the greatness within Joseph and placed him in charge of all his affairs. Meanwhile, Joseph’s brothers went back to their father, handing him the coat of many colors which they had bloodied with the blood of wild animals they had killed, making their father believe a lie that his beloved son Joseph was dead. Jacob vowed to mourn for Joseph for the rest of his days.



Joseph's coat, by [Diego Velázquez](#) (1630)

Besides Joseph, many other great Biblical characters, including David, Moses, and even Yeshua, all spent a time of preparation in what we call ‘the wilderness’ before fulfilling their destiny.² We also may sense a unique calling from God upon our lives - a special destiny. We may feel that we are called to leadership in a certain area, and so we wonder what _____ am I doing stuck in this PIT??!! How could the (person or people I loved and trusted) ____ hurt and betray me like this?



The answer to these questions is very simple - we are being prepared....purified....refined by the refiners fire.... made ready to rule and reign with Yeshua as Kings (M'lachim) and Priests (Cohanim) with Him in His Kingdom. Yeshua said he would baptize us with the Holy Spirit and with fire.³

If we will submit to the fires of purification and trust God to be with us; then with Him by our side we will walk through the fires and not be burned. We must release all resentment, bitterness and unforgiveness; and only then may God exalt us in His perfect way and perfect time to occupy that position of leadership and fulfill our destiny. Although the fire can be uncomfortable and even painful, it can be the very thing that sets us free, as demonstrated by the story of Daniel's friends.⁴ Shadrach, Mishach and Abednego were thrown bound into the fiery furnace, but there was seen a ‘fourth man’ walking in the fire with them. **“Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods.”** (Daniel 3:25)



When they emerged, the men were free – the bonds that tied them had been loosed and - I love this – they didn't even smell like smoke!! Halleluyah! When we walk through these fiery trials with Yeshua by our side – NOTHING can touch us! We're going to come out of it better off than before, and if we will stay faithful, we're not even gonna smell like smoke! People won't even be able to tell that we've gone through anything. We're not going to look all beat up and worn out; people are going to say, “Wow - you're lookin' great! What have you been doing lately?” And we can answer, “Oh, just walking through the fire with Yeshua.” ☺ Halleluyah!

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego by [Simeon Solomon](#), 1863.

² See DVD Walking in the Wilderness: www.voiceforisrael.net

³ Matthew 3:11

⁴ 1 Peter 1:6-7

“Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are Mine...When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you.” (Isaiah 43:1-2)

Judah and Tamar

There is a curious interruption in the narrative of Joseph’s story here, as the Scriptures turn to the episode of Judah and Tamar. Judah, fourth son of Jacob and future ruler of the twelve tribes of Israel, was the one who led the decision to sell Joseph rather than kill him.

“Then Judah said to his brothers, "What do we gain by killing our brother and covering up his blood? Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, but let us not do away with him ourselves. After all, he is our brother, our own flesh." (Genesis 37:26-27)

At this time, Judah had married the daughter of a Canaanite named Shua: **“There Judah saw the daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name was Shua, and he married her and cohabited with her.”** (Genesis 38:2)

Judah’s wife conceived and had a son named Er, who married Tamar, but Er died without giving Tamar a child because the Lord was displeased with this son of Judah and prematurely took his life. Judah then urged his second born son, Onan, to take Tamar as a wife, since it was the duty of the brother of a man who died without children to marry his widow in order to perpetuate the family line.

“Then Judah said to Onan, "Join with your brother's wife and do your duty by her as a brother-in-law, and provide offspring for your brother." (Genesis 38:8)

According to the law of the Levirate Marriage (called **Yibbum**), if a married man were to die childless, his brother would be required to marry his widow and have his dead brother’s children. This concept of levirate marriage is later discussed in the book of Deuteronomy.

“When brothers live together, and one of them dies childless, the wife of the deceased man shall not marry outside to a strange man; her brother-in-law shall come to her, and take her to himself as a wife, and perform levirate marriage.

“The firstborn son whom she bears will then perpetuate the name of the dead brother, so that his name will not be obliterated from Israel.” (Deuteronomy 25:5-6)

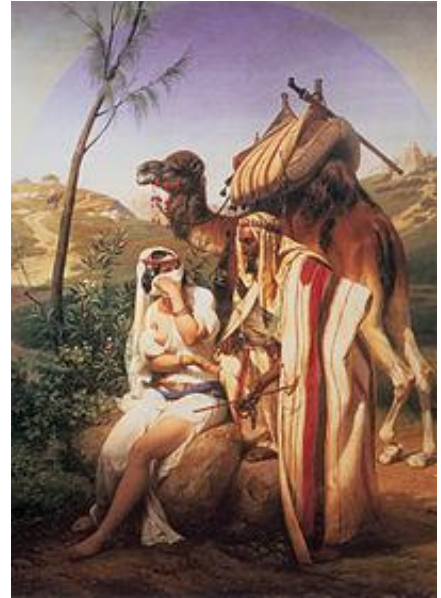
Onan, however, displeased the Lord as well, by wasting his seed when he had intercourse with Tamar, in order that he would not provide a child for his dead brother; so the Lord took his life also.

Judah had a third son, named Shelah, but did not want to risk losing his last son as well, so he told Tamar to simply wait as a widow in his home until Shelah grew to maturity. Once Shelah became a man and Judah still did not give her as a husband to Tamar, she took matters into her own hands.

Disguised as a cult prostitute, she lured Judah into a sexual encounter with her which resulted in her becoming pregnant. Approximately three months later, when her pregnancy became evident, Judah ordered her executed for harlotry; but it was then that Tamar displayed Judah's seal, cord, and staff, which he had given Tamar as pledge of payment.

“As she was being brought out, she sent this message to her father-in-law, 'I am with child by the man to whom these belong.' And she added, 'Examine these: whose seal and cord and staff are these?'" (Genesis 38:25)

Judah then realized that he had been caught in an immoral act as bad as or worse than Tamar's, so he set her free. Tamar gave birth to twins, one of whom, Perez, became the great-grandfather of King David, in the lineage of the Messiah. Judah is considered, in traditional Judaism, the father of the Mashiach (Messiah), who we know to be Yeshua, Lion from the tribe of Judah.



Judah and Tamar (1840 painting by [Horace Vernet](#))

What does this story show us? Even the lowest points of our lives can be redeemed, by the mercies of God, to become the very pinnacle. Judah's fall into immorality, deserving of the death penalty, resulted in a life that would eventually bring forth the Messiah of all mankind.

Likewise, Joseph's dark descent into a pit, his betrayal by his brothers, his period of slavery in Egypt and abandonment in a dungeon for a crime he did not commit, all led up to the moment when he was exalted over all of Egypt, next to Pharaoh. It was in this position that Joseph was able to save, not only all of Egypt, but his own family as well.

When times are the darkest – when we have fallen into a pit – either by those who sin against us, or by our own sin – we can take heart for Yeshua has overcome. God promises to make all things work together for our good, for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose.

“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.” (Romans 8:28)

Usually, this parashah reading coincides with the festival of Chanukah (Feast of Dedication). The Temple menorah contained seven branches, but the Menorah of Chanukah (called a Hanukkiah) contains eight branches. What is the significance of this?

According to Jewish thought, the number seven symbolizes perfection, completion and wholeness, for in six days the Lord created the heavens and the earth but on the seventh day His word was complete and so He rested. Seven also represents, in Jewish mysticism, the highest seven emotions of the human soul.

On Chanukah, however, the courage and bravery of the Jewish freedom fighters, the Maccabees, was so great that the Hanukkah merits eight branches rather than seven. The light of heroism in

this time of darkness is believed to have transcended even the luminescence of the menorah kindled in the Holy Temple in Jerusalem.

It is when life is at its darkest that our light can shine most brightly.

Yeshua said, *"I am the Light of the World."* His true light can sustain us through the darkest of nights as we continue to place our faith and trust in Him.

"Then Yeshua spoke to them again: 'I am the light of the world. Anyone who follows Me will never walk in the darkness but will have the light of life.'" (John 8:12)



Knesset Menorah

Today is a dark time in the lives of the people of Israel as we are being attacked on every side by Palestinian terrorists; but it is right in the center of this darkness that Yeshua can shine His light through us.

A Comparison of Yoseph & Yeshua

One of the most beautiful aspects of the story of Joseph is seeing the amazing parallels between his life and the life of Yeshua Hamashiach (the Messiah). The similarities between Yoseph and Yeshua are striking:

- They were both shepherds of their father's sheep. Yeshua said, "I am the good shepherd" (John 10:11)
- They were both their father's beloved sons. God said of Yeshua, "This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased..." (Matthew 3:17)
- They were both sent by their father to their brothers. Yeshua said, "I was sent to the lost sheep of the House of Israel..." (Matthew 15:24)
- They were hated by their brothers, rejected, and treated with injustice.
- Others plotted to harm them.
- They were both tempted (Joseph by Potiphar's wife and Yeshua by the devil)
- They were both taken to Egypt: "Out of Egypt I have called my son." (Matthew 2:15)
- They both had special robes that were taken from them
- They were both sold for the price of a slave
- They were both bound in chains

- They were both falsely accused but were innocent
- They were both placed with two other prisoners, one who was saved and the other lost
- They were both thirty years old at the beginning of their public recognition.
- They were both exalted after suffering. (Philippians 2:9-10)
- They both forgave those who wronged them. Yeshua said, “Father forgive them...”⁵
- They both saved their own people as well as other nations.
- They both brought bread to the people. Yeshua said, “I am the living bread.” (John 6:51)
- The evil men did to them God turned to good – even salvation of many people.
- They were both considered dead but later found out to be alive.
- Joseph’s brethren vow never to bow down to him but eventually do bow before him. The Word of God promises that at the name of Yeshua every knee will eventually bow.⁶
- Joseph’s brothers at first don’t recognize him, but later do come to understand who he is. Many Messianic Jews do recognize Yeshua as the Messiah today; and the Hebrew prophet, Zechariah, wrote that one day all the Jews will recognize him.⁷

These last two points, especially, give us such hope as a prophetic promise of what will take place between Yeshua and His brethren – the Jewish people. Just as Joseph’s brothers mocked him and vowed they would never bow down to him, so do Yeshua’s Jewish brethren also refuse to bow to Yeshua.

The idea that Yeshua could actually be the promised Messiah is, to most Jewish people, still a preposterous notion. They laugh and mock at our faith; but eventually, one day, “*every knee shall bow and every tongue will confess that Yeshua is Adonai.*” (Philippians 2:10) Just as Joseph’s brothers eventually came to recognize his true identity, when he declared, “**Ani Yoseph**” (I am Joseph), so will the Jewish people, Yeshua’s brethren, one day come to see him as the true Messiah of Israel and savior of mankind.

One day a great reconciliation will take place and He will say to His Jewish brothers, “**Ani Yeshua Hamashiach**” (I am Yeshua the Messiah) and they will see him for who He truly is.

⁵ Luke 23:34

⁶ Philippians 2:10

⁷ Zechariah 12:10

Joseph's brothers did not recognize him while he dressed as an Egyptian – he looked like an Egyptian and he spoke in a foreign language. In other words, he appeared as a stranger to his brethren. Similarly, the image of Yeshua has been changed over the centuries into a foreign, Gentile 'god', making it nearly impossible for the Jewish people to recognize Him; but the day will come when His true identity will be made known and just as Joseph's brothers wept in sorrow and fear, so will the Jewish people mourn for him as an only son.

"And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son." (Zechariah 12:10)

But wait – I have given you the ending of the story ahead of time. We need to fill in some of the details of how Joseph came from the pit to the palace – from prisoner to prince. Being a handsome man, Joseph drew the unwanted attention of Potiphar's wife. She repeatedly asked Joseph to lie with her, but Joseph refused, asking how he could possibly sin against God.⁸

It is amazing that despite all Joseph's terrible trials, he did not allow them to poison his heart. We can see that Joseph did not let himself to become bitter toward his God, no matter how bitter his circumstances.

When Potiphar's wife falsely accused Joseph of trying to force himself upon her, Potiphar threw him into prison; but even there God was with him. One of the names of God is simply Yehovah Shamah יהוה שמה (God who is There). Wherever we are, even in a pit or in prison, God is there. Joseph and the Wife of Potiphar (painting circa 1816–1817 by [Philipp Veit](#))



"But יהוה was with Joseph and showed him mercy, and He gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison." (Genesis 39:21)

While imprisoned, Joseph used his prophetic gifting to interpret the dreams of Pharaoh's two officers: the chief butler and the chief baker, giving all the credit to God.

"So Joseph said to them, "Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell them to me, please." (Genesis 40:8)

The baker ended up executed, but the butler was restored to Pharaoh's service, just as Joseph predicted. Astonished, the butler promised to mention him to Pharaoh, but forgot his promise. It

⁸ Joseph 39:9

was not yet God's perfect timing for Joseph's release. May we also have the extreme grace to trust God's exquisite timing for our personal freedom from injustice and bondage.

This parashah does not end with victory; however, but rather with Joseph languishing in prison - ignored and forgotten:

“Yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgot him.” (Genesis 40:23)

Perhaps it is for the best that we do stop here, because this is perhaps where some of us now find ourselves. We have not yet arrived at the victory celebration. We yet sit in darkness and loneliness, feeling forgotten and neglected; but this is the beauty of the story – the exact thing that gives us hope! For in knowing the happy end to Joseph's story, we may gain strength to hold onto our hope in God. Even though people may forget us, we are never forgotten by God.



Joseph Interprets Dreams in Prison (painting circa 1816–1817 by Friedrich Wilhelm Schadow)

No matter what we go through; no matter how unjustly we have been treated or how deep the PIT we find ourselves in, God is in control and His children will never be forsaken – not now and not ever! **“For the LORD will not cast off his people, neither will he forsake his inheritance.”** (Psalm 94:14)

Man may forget; but God does not forget his own. And it is when the night is darkest we are at that moment closest to the dawn. The word of God promises that God will work all things for good for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose. (Romans 8:28)

Will we believe this and remain prisoners of hope?⁹ Yes and amen. Yeshua told us to always pray and not to lose heart. (Luke 18:1) Please keep praying for the Jewish people to see Yeshua in his true identity as our Jewish Messiah; that they may be saved.

Shabbat Shalom and thank you for studying Torah with us. To donate on-line through Paypal:

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⁹ Zechariah 9:12