

Vayetze (And he went out)

Genesis 28:10-32:2(3), Hosea 11:7-14:9, John 1:19-51

A Messianic Jewish Commentary By Hannah Nesher

Shalom and welcome to this week's study of the Word of God. This portion of Scripture begins with Jacob leaving Be'er Sheva and fleeing to the land of his mother's family to escape Esau and to find a wife.

Along the way, he spends the night and has a dream of a ladder set up on earth and reaching to heaven, with angels of God ascending and descending on it.

The first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, aleph, א looks like such a ladder. Remembering that we read Hebrew from right to left, we can see that the letter **aleph** begins the words for God: Adonai, אֲדֹנָי Elohim, אֱלֹהִים and Abba אָבָא. It is also the first letter of the Hebrew word, Ahavah, אָהָבָה which means Love. **God is Love**. And because of God's great love for us, He sent Yeshua to earth to be like a 'ladder' –bridging the gap between Heaven and earth - showing us the way to our Father.

Note: For a study on the letters of the Hebrew Aleph-bet, see Shalom Morah II, a Hebrew course on DVD. Order through: www.voiceforisrael.net

The angels are first mentioned as 'ascending' the ladder which indicates that they may have been accompanying Jacob on his journey. Psalm 34:7 says that **“the angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them.”**

When we walk in the fear of the Lord, we can expect angels to protect us from evil. We may not see them but by faith we can know that even if we are without human friends on a journey, we have unseen angelic beings with us to protect, help and encourage.

God then appears to Jacob, identifying Himself as יְהוָה, God of his fathers, Abraham and Isaac. God affirms the significance of Jacob's generational line, since it was to his father and grandfather that God made the original promise.

Now, the covenantal inheritance is passed on to Jacob: **“The land where you lie, to you will I give it, and to your seed (descendants).”** (Gen. 28:13)



Photo: The angels climb Jacob's Ladder on the west front of Bath Abbey. (Wikipedia)

Beit-El – a ‘kadosh’ place

Those of us who descend from our father, Jacob, can claim our inheritance in this Land, not by our own will, but by Divine decree. We can therefore have confidence that God is on our side in the battle for this Land; and if God is for us, who can be against us? *Anyone who stands against the Jewish people’s right to the Land of Israel is positioning themselves against the Almighty God!*

When Jacob wakes up, he marks the spot with a stone and calls it **Beit-El, (Bethel)** which means the **House of God**. We usually think of the House of God as a place of worship inside a building, but here we see that God is not contained within or limited to structures.

A road sign in Israel



Any place can be made sacred by the presence of God. When Moses stood before the burning bush, God instructed him to take off his sandals because he was standing on holy (kadosh) ground.

The Hebrew word for holy, ‘kadosh’, means to be ‘set apart’ for a special purpose. We can read about the wrath of God that came against the king of Babylon, Belshazzar, when he used the kadosh vessels that were from the Holy Temple of Jerusalem (Beit Hamikdash) for his own drunken party. The ‘writing was on the wall’ – God destroyed him that very night and the Persians conquered the Babylonian empire! (Daniel 5:13-31)

Any place or space that is set apart by God by His holy presence can become a ‘Beit-El’ in our lives.

The tithe – a ‘kadosh’ portion

Then Jacob made a vow, saying, “If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear so that I return safely to my father’s household, then the LORD will be my God and this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God’s house, and **of all that you give me I will give you a tenth.**” (Genesis 28:20-22)

Jacob makes a vow to devote a tenth of his prosperity to God’s service. This is the first mention of a vow in the Bible and it is interesting to note that it is about material provision – the tithe.

Every good and perfect gift comes from above. Everything we have comes from God. He is our true source of provision – not man, not our job, not our savings account, not our investments, not even our ministry. It is God who provides all of our needs according to His riches in Messiah Yeshua.

The only thing He asks for (with a promise of a multiplied return) is the first 10% of the prosperity He blesses us with. Giving the tithe protects us from the tendency of the flesh towards greediness; it says we acknowledge God as our true source and give back what is 'kadosh' – the set apart portion of our finances – which He has given us in the first place.

It reminds me of a time years ago when the kids were little and we sometimes went to MacDonald's for a treat. I would buy them a 'happy meal' - junior burger, drink and fries with ketchup which they would happily devour.

Once in a while, I would ask them if I could have one of their fries. This usually brought a loud cry of protest!

"NO, these are my fries!", they shouted. "But I bought you all this in the first place with my money – and you won't even give me one measly little fry?" I asked.

"Well....okay..." they reluctantly agreed, handing over one, broken, crumbly, fry in their greasy little hands. Thankfully they have grown into generous, cheerful givers – each one of them. And we also need to grow up and mature – to stop hoarding those 'fries' - for God loves a cheerful giver. ☺



Numbers are important in Judaism. Why a tenth? Why not a twelfth? Or a 15th? When Abraham interceded for the salvation of the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, it came down to the number 10. God said that for the sake of ten, He would hold back the destroyer.

It works the same way in our finances. For the sake of a tenth of our finances, God promises to hold back the destroyer from our material goods. (Mal. 3:11) Those who do make the commitment to tithe and follow through on their vow faithfully will find that God is also faithful to His word to rebuke the devourer for our sakes and to bless and prosper us in return.

But if we are robbing God, how can we expect His financial blessing on our lives? I think the key is to keep in mind that giving God the firstfruits of all our increase is a faith act, a supernatural thing, something which doesn't quite make sense in the natural. Therefore it must be done before, not after all the bills come in.

Because if we wait to see if there will be anything left over for God, there surely won't be. But if we give God the first, putting Him first in our finances and in our lives, then He will do a miracle and make the 90% remainder be more than enough to meet our needs.

"Honor the Lord with your possession, and with the first fruits of all your increase, so your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine." (Proverbs 3:9-10)

We are to honor God with the ‘first fruits’ not the ‘last fruits’ or leftovers. I tell you honestly, I have a healthy fear of leaving my tithe in my possession for very long. I start to get nervous, knowing that if I don’t give it to God, He will likely arrange for the ‘devourer’ to eat it up some other way – and that way is usually not pleasant. So I go looking for some work of the Lord or poor person to give it to.

I remember one day I had \$40 in tithe that still needed to be given away. I wasn’t planning to go to any congregation that day, but I really felt I needed to give it away ASAP, so I prayed, *“God, please send me someone who I can give this tithe to.”*

Shortly afterwards, a beat up old truck pulled up in front of my house and a young man got out, came to my door and rang the bell. When I opened the door to him, he asked me if I had any bottles he could turn into the recycling depot. I knew immediately that this was the one God had sent to me to receive my tithe.

I rounded up some bottles and then also gave him the \$40, saying this was from the Lord to bless him. This young man looked shocked, thanked me profusely, and then began to weep.

He explained that he was a backslidden Christian,; and that he needed exactly \$40 to renew his license in order to get back home. When I gave him this money, saying that it was from the Lord, he knew that His heavenly father was calling him, a prodigal son, home and that he needed to get right with God. We had a chance to pray together and then he was on his way.

When we are willing to make a vow like Jacob did, to give God the ‘tenth’, then God will not only keep us, and provide for our material needs, but He will also use it to bless others. **“Blessed is he who considers the poor, the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble. The Lord will preserve him and keep him alive. And he will be blessed on the earth...”** (Psalm 41:1-2).

Wow, what a wonderful and powerful promise! We give God the tithe, not out of law and obligation, but out of gratitude for His care and protection and as a sign of our dedication to and trust in Him. Proverbs 14:21 observes that **“whoever shows kindness to the poor will be happy (blessed).”**

Just the other night, I took my youngest daughter, Liat, along with three of her girlfriends to a beautiful movie. Along the way, we came across several beggars – one of which was lying on the ground right next to the tracks of the light rail transit. Arms wrapped in bandages, he cried out, **“Ta’azor Li! (Help me!).”**

Immediately the word of the Lord came to me **that if we close our ears to the cry of the poor and ignore them, there will come a day that we too will cry out and no one will listen.** (Proverbs 21:13) beggar in Jerusalem, photo by Shlomi Cohen



I gladly gave from what I had, even though I needed the sheckels for the movie.

When we arrived at the theatre, we found that other kids from Liat's class were also seeing the same movie. They had come, in part, to help celebrate Liat's birthday too. I was blown away when the father of one of the boys paid the tickets for ALL of us! PTL!

On our way back, I noticed that the time had expired on our train tickets, which meant we would have to pay for new train tickets for all of us. A young man nearby turned to me and asked, "Do you need tickets?" He had bought eight tickets from the machine by mistake because he couldn't read Hebrew and was just going to throw them out. Instead, he gave me to me – so we all rode the train back for free. Halleluyah!

When we tithe and give to the poor, God makes sure we are at the right place at the right time to receive His blessings! **"He who gives to the poor will not lack, but he who hides his eyes will have many curses."** (Proverbs 28:27)

I know I'm probably 'preaching to the choir' here, but in case someone out there needed that bit of encouragement to trust God more in the area of finances and step out in obedience with regards to giving, here is your 'word' from out of Zion.

Now is always a good time to repent for withholding our tithe from the Lord and to begin walking in obedience. His compassion is new every morning; great is His faithfulness.

Love at first sight

Now we move on from the subject of money to that of love. In the next chapter, Genesis 29, Jacob meets Rachel and it's love at first sight. I don't think it always has to happen this way; sometimes love grows out of a mutual friendship that turns into something more.

But it also happened like this with my daughter, Courtney, and her beloved husband, Emanuel. When she first spotted him, leading worship on the platform, she leaned towards me and said, "*Mom, he sings like an angel.*" I had to agree.

Emanuel first met Courtney at a Shavuot ¹picnic at a beautiful place in Israel called Gan Hashlosha; a place of waterfalls and orchids – the perfect place for falling in love. And they did.



Immersion (Mikvah) at Gan Hashlosha

¹ Shavuot – Feast of Weeks/Pentecost

Perhaps it happened something like this for Yaacov (Jacob). When he first saw Rachel, he kissed her, lifted up his voice and wept. Wow. Can we imagine someone having such a reaction over meeting us for the first time? ☺

Jacob worked for his uncle Laban for seven years for the hand of Rachel in marriage but it seemed only a few days, because of the great love he had for her. Isn't it true that when we love something or someone, time just flies by?

When I write, hours can pass and I barely notice. On the other hand, when we are doing something we dislike, every minute can seem like an eternity.



Courtney & Emanuel's wedding photo

B'dikat Kalah (Checking the Bride)

The plot thickens, however, when Laban tricks Jacob into marrying his other daughter, Leah, instead of Rachel. It's hard for us to understand how Jacob couldn't have known that he had the wrong girl on his wedding night, but I suppose in the days of heavy veils, it happened.

Thus we have a Jewish custom that continues even until today called '**b'dikat kalah**' which means the checking of the bride. Before each Jewish wedding ceremony, the bridegroom, accompanied by his father, future father-in-law, male guests and musicians, come to where the bride is receiving her guests. Here she sits like a queen, on a throne-like chair, surrounded by family and friends. The groom, who has by this time not seen her for a week (which must seem like an eternity to a young couple in love), correctly identifies his bride and then covers her face with a veil. This Jewish custom is to ensure that he does indeed have the right one this time and that no one has pulled a 'Laban' on him. ☺

The Principle of Sowing and Reaping

We can see Jacob as the poor, duped victim here – or we can recognize a spiritual law that as we sow, so shall we reap. Jacob, whose very name can mean 'a **deceiver**', duped his father with a case of 'mistaken identity'; and in the exact same way, Jacob is now duped with a case of 'mistaken identity'.

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. (Gal. 6:7)

As surely as if we plant apple seeds we will receive apples, so will we reap whatever we sow, whether for good or for evil. And if that isn't motivation for going about doing as much good as we can, to as many people as we can, in as many places as we can, then I don't know what is!

And it seems to me an effective deterrent, once we understand this spiritual principle, to avoid doing evil as well. Anything we do to others comes back upon us, whether for good, or for evil, or as is commonly said, “What goes around comes around.” It is a spiritual law or principle. Whatever we do will come back to us.

God speaks this to the nations about their treatment of Israel: **“For the day of the Lord upon all the nations is near; as you have done, it shall be done to you.”** (Obadiah 1:15)

Whatever we give out is what we are going to receive back in return. If we give out lies, trickery and deception it is going to come back into our lives one way or another. Yeshua said that **as we give, so shall it be given unto us.** (Luke 6:38)

If we give out love, we will receive love in return, but if we are giving out judgment, criticism, and blame, we will also receive this coming back into our lives in the same measure.

So instead of seeing ourselves as helpless victims, blown about by the whims and decisions and even sinfulness of other people, we can examine the plank in our own eye first and see if we may possibly have sown some ‘bad seed’ and are now reaping the negative consequences.

Generational Curses

There is another issue that comes into play here in the story of Jacob’s life and that is the reality of generational curses. We don’t know how far back the line of deception, but we do know that Abraham asked Sarah to present herself as his sister rather than his wife in order to save his skin.

Moving down one generation, we see the same kind of deception in the next generation: Abraham’s son, Isaac, presents his wife, Rebekkah, as his sister also.

And now here we see that Isaac’s son, Jacob, also uses deceit to manipulate for his own purposes. In obedience to his mother, Jacob presents himself to his near blind father as his twin brother, Esau, in order to receive his blessing.

Just as Isaac and Jacob inherited the blessing from their father, Abraham, they also inherited some of his sinful tendencies. It is a hard truth that the sins of the fathers are often passed down to the children.

We can see this in families where generation after generation suffer from the same problems of poverty, divorce, abuse, alcoholism, etc. The word of God says that the sins of the fathers will be passed down to the third or fourth generation,² but His mercy to the thousandth generation to those who love Him and keep His commandments. (Deut. 7:9)

² Deut. 5:9

Hope in Yeshua

So what hope is there for us if our family lineage is less than perfect? If we see that our ancestors have not loved God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength? If they have had glaring sin in their lives that we now see the same tendencies in ourselves or our children?

What hope do we have if we know we have, out of ignorance or in sin, planted some bad seeds that are surely going to produce a harvest of unrighteousness and negative consequences in our lives?

Our hope is in Yeshua and the work He completed on the cross! **He who knew no sin, became sin for us**, so that the curses could be broken in our lives and in the generations to come through the cross.

In the beginning, when Adam and Eve fell through their disobedience and God evicted them from the garden of Eden, the sign of the curse upon humankind would be that the ground would yield thorns and thistles.

But when Yeshua was crucified, he wore a crown of thorns upon his own head. As the old hymn goes, *“I love Thee for wearing that crown on Thy brow; if ever I loved Thee, My Jesus ‘tis now....”* How we can love Yeshua and be so thankful that in wearing that crown of thorns (in Hebrew ‘Kotzim’)³ on his brow, he broke the power of these generational curses. (See article on Kotsim (thorns) on website.

We can place the cross of Yeshua between us and any negative words, thoughts or deeds that have come from ourselves or anyone else, and ask that they drop powerless to the ground.

Yes, we need to strive to live godly, pure, holy lives full of the fruit of the Spirit, doing good, that we may also reap a blessing. But until that perfect day that we awake into His likeness and see our Redeemer face to face, we will always need the forgiving and atoning power of the blood of Yeshua.

Let’s make sure that we avail ourselves of God’s provision for sin and apply the blood of the Lamb to our generational line and to each and every sin on a continual basis.

Yehudah – Praise the Lord

We also see generational curses at work in the women: Rachel was barren, as was Sarah, and needed God’s supernatural intervention in order to conceive. And just like Sarah, she gives her husband to her handmaid to have sexual relations with her to give her a child.

³ See article, Kotzim (Thorns) www.voiceforisrael.net/articles

In the Middle Eastern culture of this time, barrenness brought terrible grief and shame to a woman. Rachel demanded that Jacob give her children, “or else I die”; even though obviously the problem is not with Jacob, as Leah seems extremely fertile. Isn’t that just like us, to want to blame someone else for our own problems?

God sees that Leah is not loved by her husband so he compensates her with many children. Pathetically, she thinks that with each child, perhaps her husband will love her this time. (Gen. 29:32) Too often, people with problems in their marriage think that having a child will bond them together but all too often, it produces the opposite effect.

Finally she has a son and calls him Yehudah (Judah) and she said, “**This time will I ‘praise the Lord.’** In the end, Leah learns something we all need to come to terms with – that in the end it is our relationship with the Lord that will stand, therefore we need to praise Him.

The word Yehudah (Plural Yehudim) is the word used for ‘Jew’ in Hebrew. A Jew is to be someone who praises the Lord. The Jewish people today mostly come from this son of Leah, Yehudah.

The place where I currently live in Israel is called **Match Yehudah**, situated in the historic Judean lands that belonged to the ancient Tribe of Judah. Here is our little village we are lifting up praise and worship to the Lord.



Panoramic view of Match Yehudah from our village

Who is a true Jew? Paul said that a true Jew is one inwardly, whose circumcision is that of the heart and in the Spirit... (Romans 2:19)

If we are praising the Lord, we are Yehudim, of the tribe of Judah, as is our Savior, Yeshua, Lion of Judah.

Finally, Rachel gives birth to Joseph, the favored child of destiny, of whom we will be studying more in future parashot.

Blessing Overflow

Once Yosef, the child of destiny was born, Jacob knew it was time to leave and return to the Land of his fathers. ⁴ There may be some children, with a specific call and destiny upon their lives who need a particular environment in which to grow up.

Jacob knew that Joseph could not be raised in Haran, but that he needed to return home to the Land God had given them.

Laban openly admitted that **God had blessed him for Jacob's sake.**⁵ When we are walking with the Lord, people should feel blessed just for having us around. When we carry the presence of God, the blessing can spill out upon others nearby and they can get blessed too.

I remember the story of my Zaida⁶ (whose name was also Jacob) who escaped the pogroms in the 'Old Country' at the age of 13 and came to pioneer in the Northern region of Alberta, Canada. In his old age, he left the area to move closer to the city and the neighboring farmers wept, saying, "Who will pray for our crops now?"

They saw that my Zaida would never go out with the tractor to farm on Shabbat (7th day Sabbath), even if the weather was perfect and the forecast was for rain during the coming week. He might fuss and worry and say "*oye vey, oye vey...*" all day long, but he had enough fear of the Lord that he would not dare to break the Sabbath.

The Gentile farmers knew that when my godly, observant Jewish grandfather left, the blessing was going with him. I think this is why Laban was reluctant to let Jacob go as well; he coveted the blessing that came just with having Jacob around.

If God be for us....

But Jacob determines to leave, obeying the voice of the Lord that said only two things: "**Return to the land of your fathers....and I will be with you.**"⁷

⁴ Gen 30:25

⁵ Gen. 30:27

⁶ Zaida - grandfather

⁷ Gen. 31:3

For those of us who have also chosen to return to the land of our Fathers, this word may be the only thing we have to stand on as well – faith that God is directing us to return in these last days... and that He will be with us.

Jacob fully trusts in the Lord now, seeing that even though Laban, his father in law, tried to cheat him many times, God did not allow this to do Jacob any harm.⁸

God is our vindicator; when people try to do us wrong, we can fully entrust ourselves into the hands of the One who is completely righteous and just.

Jacob boldly says, **“Except the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the Fear of Isaac, had been on my side, surely you would have sent me away empty.”** (Gen. 31:42)

In other words, Jacob knew that having God on his side made all the difference – and we can too. When someone tries to cheat us or mistreat us; when someone does us harm over and over again, we can boldly say, **“If God be for me, who can be against me?!”** (Romans 8:31)

We can trust God to make it up to us, saying, **“The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?”** (Psalm 27:1)

God in us is greater than any force that would try to come against us, therefore we can live with strength and courage – because having God on our side makes all the difference.

HaLLELUYAH!

Haftorah (Prophetic Portion): Hosea 12:13-14:10

Israel –God’s Beloved Bride

This haftorah begins with a clear link to the parashah with Jacob fleeing to his mother’s family to find a wife. The book of Hosea uses marriage as a metaphor to describe Israel’s relationship to God.

The Northern Kingdom of Israel is called Ephraim, and Hosea prophesied its destruction at the hands of Assyria. In the 8th century, the increase of wealth and prosperity led to a decline of morality along with an increase of idolatry.

We must be very careful that when riches come, we don’t set our hearts on them, but keep God in first place in our lives.

God instructs Hosea to take Gomer, a prostitute, for a wife. The husband/wife relationship is to be a sacred bond that no man or woman should separate once joined together.

⁸ Gen. 31:7

However, God used Gomer to illustrate how Israel, His beloved Bride, had been unfaithful to Him. Israel, in turning to other gods, had broken their sacred marital trust with God and He is forced to bring punishment.

But just as a loving parent enforces consequences not to harm a child, but out of love, to bring that child to a right and good path, so is God's discipline of Israel redemptive in purpose.

Right discipline is done out of love and commitment, not punitive retribution or vengeance. **“He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him properly.”** (Prov. 13:24)

We are not doing our children any favors by failing to chastise them Biblically; in fact when we withhold discipline it does not show love but rather hatred of the child. We must be more concerned with their character and eternal destiny than their momentary happiness or tears.

Marital unfaithfulness is not just an ‘oops’ that can be swept under the rug and forgotten; it must be dealt with and restoration is always a possibility. God's hand is not too short to save, nor His power too weak to deliver.⁹

Just as Hosea was unable to bring himself to divorce his wayward wife, so is God not willing to divorce His Bride, Israel, and to replace her with another.

The lie of Replacement Theology

Replacement theology is a lie. God is faithful to His covenant; but He has made a way for anyone of any tongue or tribe to join the commonwealth of Israel and to be grafted into the olive tree through the blood of the Jewish Messiah, Yeshua.

Even after the pronouncement of doom upon Ephraim, God still beseeches Israel to return to Him. This is the Hebrew meaning of the word for repentance, Tshuvah – from the word shuvah **שובה** which means to turn away from sin and turn towards God.

God promises **to heal their backsliding** and to love them freely, despite their sins against Him. What a loving, gracious and forgiving God we have. He deals with sin in our lives and disciplines us as a good Father would, but is also slow to anger and great in mercy. **“I will be as the dew unto Israel...”** (Hosea 14:6)

Just as Jacob searched for that right person with whom to establish a sacred marital bond, so does God search to and fro for someone whose heart will be loyal and steadfast to Him.

On a human level, marital bonds may be broken through abuse and infidelity and the marriage may dissolve; but the covenant of love between us and our God will be forever.

⁹ Isaiah 50:1-2

May we each have soft hearts of repentance towards God and trust Him to forgive us, heal us of our backsliding, and bring spiritual and physical restoration.

May we turn away from putting our trust in any foreign alliances, but stay faithful to our God and Redeemer unto the end. When He returns for us, may He find a faithful remnant waiting for Him.

“Riches take wings, comforts vanish, hope withers away, but love stays with us. God is love.”
Lew Wallace

Shabbat Shalom,

Love Hannah

www.voiceforisrael.net

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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 Christians about the Jewish roots of their faith.

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