

VAYELECH {וַיֵּלֶךְ} (And He Went)

Deuteronomy 31:1-31:30, Hosea 14:2-10, Joel 2:11-27, Micah 7:18-20,

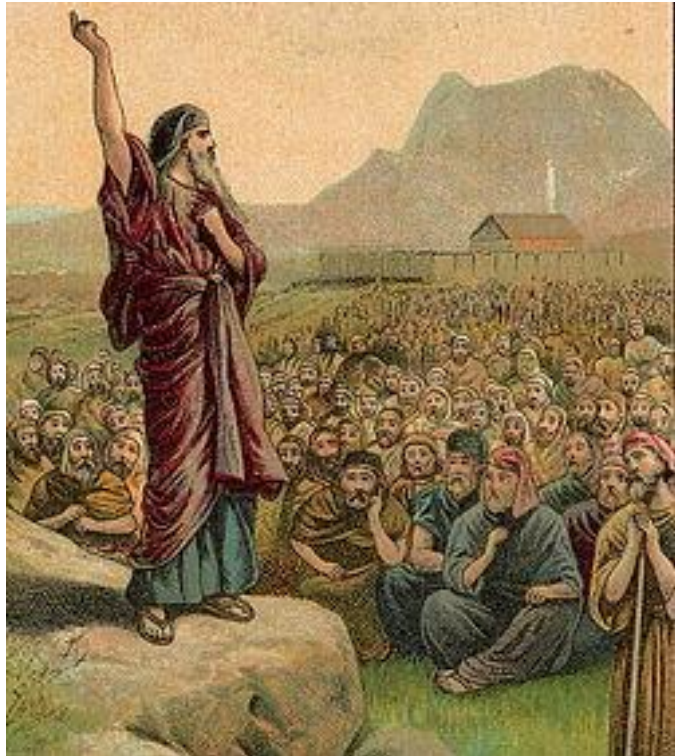
Isaiah 55-56:3, Romans 10:14-18

“Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the LORD your God, He *is* the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you.” (Deuteronomy 31:6)

This week’s Torah portion, Vayelech, (וַיֵּלֶךְ — Hebrew for "then he went out"), is the shortest Torah reading of the year, consisting of only one chapter. At the age of one hundred and twenty years old, Moses knew that his death was imminent; therefore he attempted to prepare his people for the future. Moses realized that he would not be the one to take the children of Israel over the Jordan River into the Land.

“Then Moses went and spoke these words to all Israel. And he said to them: “I *am* one hundred and twenty years old today. I can no longer go out and come in.” (Deuteronomy 31:1-2)

It is from this Scripture that the popular Yiddish blessing comes, “*May you live to one hundred and twenty! (ad me’ah v’esrim)*” It does not mean that one literally expects a person to reach the age of 120, but is just a blessing for them to live to a good old age.



Moses Pleading with Israel, illustration from a Bible card published 1907 by the Providence Lithograph Company, 1907

Moses did not die infirm and feeble, but rather strong and healthy; and yet God took him home. The time had come for Moses to die and to pass on his leadership and authority to his successor, Joshua. For everything there is a season: a time to be born and an appointed time to die:

“ To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die;” (Ecclesiastes 3:1-2)

The question is, “*Will we be ready, like Moses, when God deems it the right time to take us home?*” Moses did not accomplish all the desires of his heart before his death. He was not allowed to enter the Promised Land but only to see it from a distance; and yet, in his humility, Moses accepted God’s will in the matter.

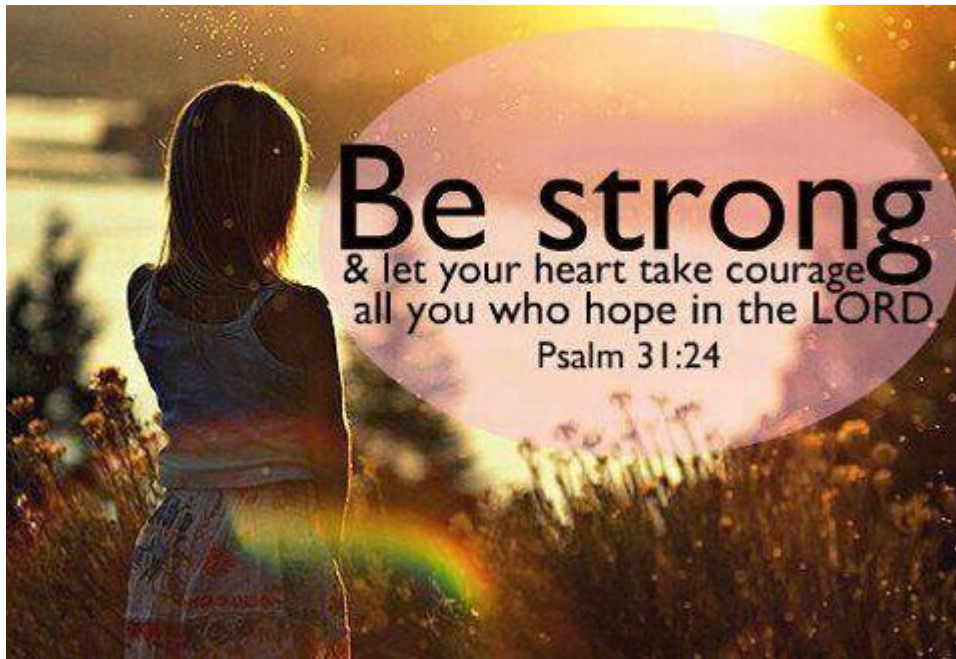
“ Also the LORD has said to me, ‘**You shall not cross over this Jordan.**’” (Deuteronomy 31:2)

We all have certain goals and achievements that we desire to see accomplished in our lifetime; but we must also accept the fact that it may not be up to us to bring even a God-given mission through to completion. This may be left up to someone who carries on after our passing into eternity.

Although Moses would not be the one to go with the people, he assured them that God would go with them and would give them victory against their enemies. People may come and go in and out of our lives; but God is the faithful One who will never abandon us.

We may come to depend upon people, even those who have been capable, strong, spiritual leaders; but ultimately we need to trust that it is God who will be our “**everpresent help in times of trouble. Therefore we shall not fear....**” (Psalms 46:1-2)

God gave a word to the people of Israel through Moses, “**Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.**” (Deuteronomy 31:6)



We are blessed to have people of strength and courage in our lives who will not speak fear and doubt when we are on the verge of entering a new thing; but will instead encourage us to be courageous by remembering that God will never leave or forsake us. We never fly solo.

Why did they need this encouragement? It was because they were about to enter into the Promised Land. They would be facing all kinds of new and different enemies that they had never encountered while in the wilderness. They would need to eat from the good of the land instead of having manna rain down each day from Heaven.

We too, when embarking upon a new venture, need to have the strength and courage to trust that God will be with us to help us overcome every challenge and to meet every need.

“Through God we will do valiantly, and it is He who shall tread down our enemies.”
(Psalms 108:13)

Transfer of Leadership

Moses was not about to leave the people like sheep without a shepherd, however; therefore he ordained Joshua, his successor, to take over the leadership role. Moses gave us a beautiful example of someone who knew how to exit his position of prominence with grace and dignity.

Moses knew when it was time to quit. He not only passed on the torch to the next generation without any display of resentment or hurt feelings; but he also publicly bestowed blessings, encouragement and affirmation upon the one who was to take his place (“in the sight of all Israel”).



Moses Names Joshua to Succeed Him (woodcut by [Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld](#) from the 1860 *Bible in Pictures*)

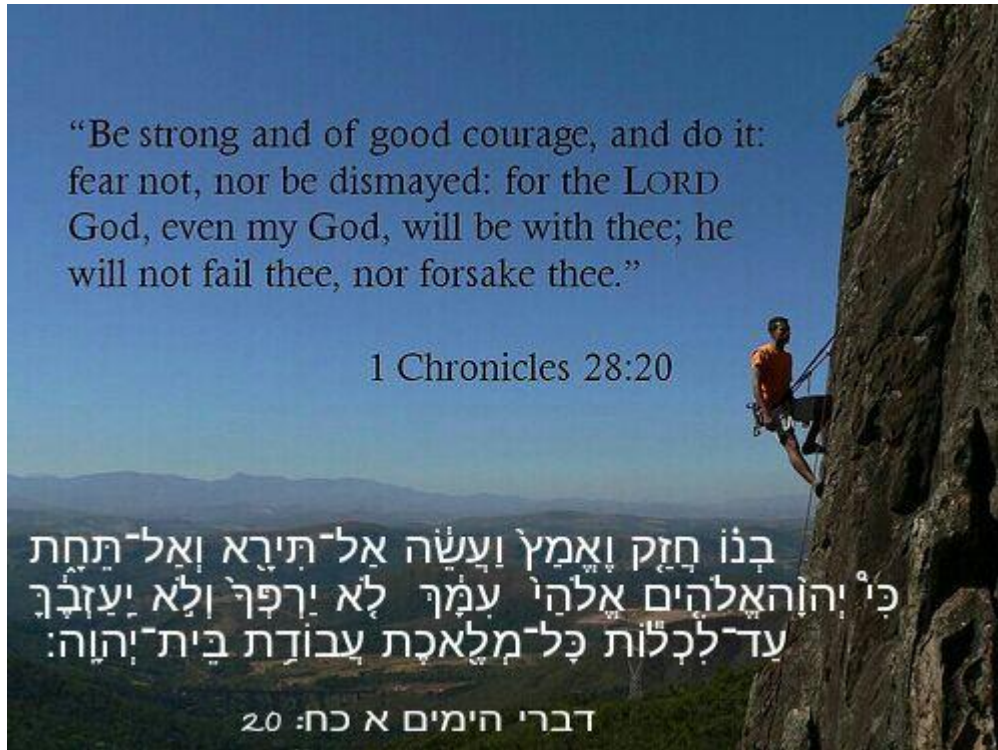
The transfer of authority (in Hebrew ‘**samchut**’), or ordination, is related to the word, **Smichah**, - a blanket, or something that covers. When we are ‘ordained’ we come under the covering of that person’s blanket of authority.

This word comes from the root s-m-ch **סמח** which means **to trust, depend, or rely upon**. Ideally, we need to be able to trust in and rely upon those in authority over us. Our earthly authorities are not always completely righteous, but Yeshua is the head of the Body of Messiah and He is the One we can always trust and depend upon.

“Then Moses called Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel, “Be strong and of good courage, for you must go with this people to the land which the LORD has sworn to their fathers to give them, and you shall cause them to inherit it.” (Deuteronomy 31:7)

Be Strong and of Good Courage

Twice Moses exhorted Joshua and the people of Israel to be ‘strong and of good courage.’ Why is there such an emphasis on being **'strong and courageous'**? Why must we be told over and over again, 'do not fear'?



It is our human nature to fall into fear and doubts when we face serious challenges in life. God knows this and therefore puts people into our lives to remind us to be strong in the Lord and not to lose heart but to keep up our courage and fight the good fight of faith. Thank God for people with the gift of encouragement!

In these last days, as we face greater trials and hear all kinds of dire predictions, we must stick together and keep encouraging one another not to lose heart but to stay in faith. I am so thankful for the people that God has placed in my life who care enough to call or send a message to encourage me when going through tough times to be ‘strong and of good courage’.

There are many things that we don’t understand about God: why He allows such suffering in life and why things seem to go so wrong when we so desperately hoped they would work out. We don’t have all the answers; we can only choose to stay in faith – and it is a decision.

We must be willing to say, “God, I don’t understand why you allow this suffering, trouble, grief or pain; I don’t understand why there are times when you don’t seem to answer my prayers – but I’m going to trust in You anyways.”

There were times when Yeshua’s disciples simply didn’t understand what He was saying or doing, but when he gave them the option to go their own way and leave Him, Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God."... (John 6:68-69)

So it is with us. There is nowhere else to go – nowhere to run but into the arms of the One who loves us – even when we don’t understand.

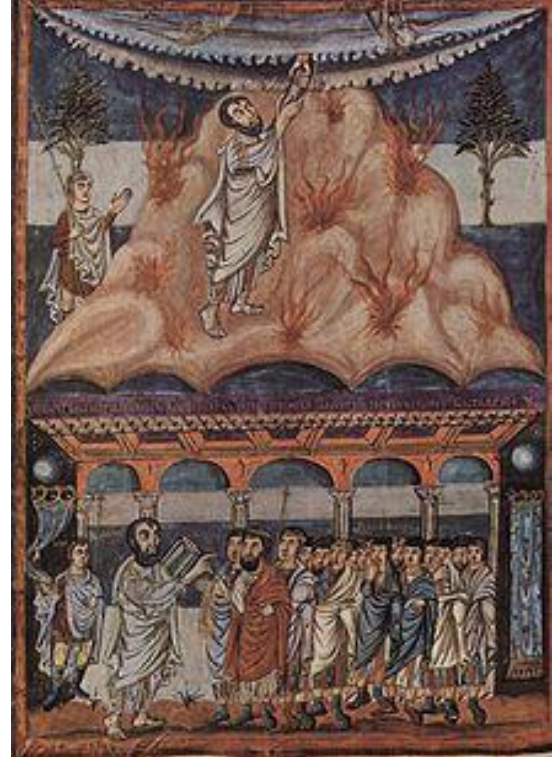
Joshua ben Nun

Who was this ‘Joshua ben (son of) Nun of the tribe of Ephraim’? This loyal disciple of Moses and skilled military leader of the campaign against Amalek, was the first to greet Moses when he descended from Mt. Sinai after waiting patiently for 40 days.

It seems that Moses made a wise decision in choosing Joshua - even over his two sons (Gershom and Eliezer) - for Joshua successfully led the children of Israel into the Promised Land, captured the city of Jericho in a stunning victory and eventually conquered the rest of Canaan as well.

Joshua is portrayed in traditional Jewish literature as a wise, faithful, humble man of God. It is thought that the verse, "He that waits on his master shall be honored" (Proverbs 27:18) refers to Joshua. In the New Testament, it is written that Yeshua was a ‘better Joshua’; since Joshua led the children of Israel into Canaan, but Yeshua leads the people of God into their true rest.¹

Because of his spiritual qualities and leadership role, the early church fathers considered Joshua a foreshadow of the Messiah.



Joshua and the Israelite people, Karolingischer Buchmaler, c.840

The First Torah Scroll

As with anything, there is a tendency for people to forget things that are not written down; therefore Moses finished his scribing of all the Torah in a special scroll which he gave for safekeeping into the hands of the Cohanim (Jewish Priests).

These sons of Levi stored the original scroll in the Ark of the Covenant along with the stone tablets upon which were written the Ten Commandments. According to the New Testament Letter to the Hebrews,² the Ark also contained Aaron's rod, and a jar of manna.

¹ Hebrews 4:8-10)

² Hebrews 9:4

Search for the Lost Ark

Is it any wonder that there is such a determined search yet ongoing for this elusive Ark of the Covenant which contains such precious treasures? Some claim to have found the 'Lost Ark' such as in Aksum Ethiopia where the Ethiopian Orthodox Church keeps a certain object (which they claim to be the Ark of the Covenant) under guard in a treasury near the Church of Our Lady Mary of Zion .

In the Book of Maccabees, it is written that the prophet Jeremiah , "being warned by God" before the Babylonian invasion, took the Ark, the Tabernacle, and the Altar of Incense, and buried them in a cave on Mount Nebo, informing those of his followers who wished to find the place that it should remain unknown "until the time that God should gather His people again together, and receive them unto mercy."³



Moses and Joshua bowing before the Ark, painting by James Jacques Joseph Tissot, c. 1900

Where is Mt. Nebo and what is its biblical and historical significance? This place, 47 km from Jerusalem near the east bank of the Jordan River, is described in the 34th chapter of the Book of Deuteronomy as the site from which Moses viewed the Promised Land and was also, therefore, likely Moses' burial site.⁴

Many other places have been suggested as locations where the Ark of the Covenant has been discovered such as: South Africa, Egypt, Arabia, Rome, Ireland, and even right under the Temple Mount.

The Bible says there will come a time when people will no longer think about the Ark of the Covenant or even miss it!

“It shall be in those days when you are multiplied and increased in the land,” declares the LORD, “they will no longer say, ‘The ark of the covenant of the LORD.’ And it will not come to mind, nor will they remember it, nor will they miss it, nor will it be made again.” (Jeremiah 3:16)



³ 2 Maccabees 2:4-10

⁴ Since it is written that God buried Moses, no one knows for sure his exact burial site

Kahal (Community)

God commanded that at the end of every seven years cycle, during the ‘shmittah’ year (year of release from debt), during the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot), all the people are to gather – men, women, children, and even the gerim (foreigners who have joined us) – to hear the words of the Torah. Ark of the Covenant (bas-relief Cathedral of Auch)

This is called the mitzvah (commandment) of **kahal קהל**. A **kehilla** in Hebrew is a **community**; It is what we call our Messianic congregations. We were never meant to live our lives in isolation or as individual islands but within a community of fellow Believers.

The Word of God tells us that a man who isolates himself seeks his own selfish desires and is not using good judgment (Proverbs 18:1-2).

Scripture exhorts us not to give up meeting together and even more so as the day of the Lord approaches: **“not forsaking our own assembling together, (as a kehilla), as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.”** (Hebrews 10:25)

In this way, by public reading, the Torah was to be taught and handed down to generation after generation, in order that they would fear the Lord and keep His commandments. We have a responsibility to teach the Word of God to our children – that they may teach their children and on down the generations – to fear God and obey His Word.

“Gather the people together, men and women and little ones, and the stranger who is within your gates, that they may hear and that they may learn to fear the LORD your God and carefully observe all the words of this law, and *that* their children, who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God as long as you live in the land which you cross the Jordan to possess.” (Deuteronomy 31:12-13)

The responsibility to diligently teach our children the Torah is taken seriously even today, amongst most of the Jewish people, based on the command, **“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.**

And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.” (Deuteronomy 6:4-7)

Passing on our faith in God is not to be a job for the ‘Sunday school teacher’ once a week during church services; but is meant to be a lifestyle of living out our faith in front of our children; and talking about God and His Word all throughout the day – every day.

The Hidden Face of God (Hester Panim)

God foreknew that despite all His warnings, the people of Israel would go astray and commit spiritual adultery by seeking after other gods and worshipping the idols of the pagans around them in the Promised Land.

“And the LORD said to Moses: ‘Behold, you will rest with your fathers; and this people will rise and play the harlot with the gods of the foreigners of the land, where they go *to be* among them, and they will forsake Me and break My covenant which I have made with them.

Then My anger shall be aroused against them in that day, and I will forsake them, and I will hide My face from them, and they shall be devoured. And many evils and troubles shall befall them, so that they will say in that day, ‘Have not these evils come upon us because our God *is* not among us?’ ” (Deuteronomy 31:16-17)

Twice, God said He would ‘hide His face’ from His people because of their sins. In Hebrew, this is called ‘*hester panim*’. Even unto today, God is maintaining this state of being hidden from the people of Israel. Only through His Son, the Messiah, Yeshua is the face of God revealed.

“Anyone who has seen me,” Yeshua said, **“has seen the Father.”** (John 14:9)

In Yeshua Hamashiach (the Messiah) we see God in all of His glory:

“For God, who said, "Let there be light in the darkness," has made this light shine in our hearts so we could know the glory of God that is seen in the face of Yeshua the Messiah.” (2 Corinthians 4:6)



Moses Speaks to the Children of Israel (illustration from Hartwell James's *The Boys of the Bible*)

The parashah ends with Moses composing a song which would act as a witness against the people of Israel. Moses knew that even as rebellious as the people of Israel had been while he was still with them; how much more so would they become after his death:

“Then Moses spoke in the hearing of all the assembly of Israel the words of this song until they were ended.” (Deuteronomy 31:30)

God, who knows the end from the beginning, already is aware of the reality that Israel will not stay faithful to Him but will become utterly corrupt and turn away from the good way Moses has taught them from God's word. As a consequence, Moses prophesies that evil will come upon Israel 'in the latter days'.

God knows our human tendency to be stiff-necked and rebellious. It is not only the ancient Israelites who suffer from this 'malady of a sin nature' but all of humankind who have been infected with the venom of the serpent from the Garden.

Therefore, God already had a plan in place to redeem, deliver, and save us from our sins and that plan came manifested in the flesh in Yeshua Hamshiach (the Messiah) who took all our sins upon Himself on the cross. Halleluyah!

“For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.” (Romans 5:19)

HAFTORAH VAYELECH

The haftorah, or prophetic portion of Vayelech, occurs during a very special period of time between Rosh Hashana (Jewish New Year) and Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement).

This ten day period, called '*Yamim Nora'im*' (Days of Awe) is traditionally practiced as a time to get right with God and our fellow man through repentance and asking forgiveness.



This Sabbath is called "Shabbat Shuvah" or Sabbath of Repentance. Shuvah comes from the Hebrew word 'shuv' which means to return. The Prophet Hosea, exhorts the nation:

“Return, Israel, to the LORD your God. Your sins have been your downfall!” (Hosea 14:1)

Hosea urges the people to trust in God rather than any other force: powerful nations, horses or idols. Then God will also turn away from his anger and return to Israel in mercy with healing and restoration.

“I will heal their waywardness and love them freely, for my anger has turned away from them. I will be like the dew to Israel; he will blossom like a lily.” (Hosea 14:4-5)

God is waiting for each one of us to return to Him in ‘tshuvah’ (repentance) and to find Him waiting with open arms to pour out His love, healing and restoration freely upon us. What are we waiting for?



Orthodox Jewish men performing ‘Tashlich’ ceremony

This Haftorah ends with a brief portion from the prophet Micah with a well known promise of forgiveness. It is this scripture which is recited when the Jewish people practice the custom of **Slichot** - a word related to Slichah, which is how we say ‘sorry’ in Hebrew.

Tashlich is a tradition in which the Jewish people go to a river or live body of water and cast bread crumbs into the water while reciting the verse:

"He does not maintain His anger forever, for He is a lover of kindness. He will have mercy on us, He will grasp our iniquities and cast all our sins into the depths of the sea." (Micah 7:18-19)



Hasidic Jews performing tashlich on Rosh Hashanah, painting by Aleksander Gierymski, 1884

As with the prophet, Micah, we do not appeal to God's mercy based on our own righteousness but because of His faithfulness to the Covenant He swore with our Fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Each and every follower of Yeshua Hamashiach (the Messiah) is a member of the commonwealth of Israel and a partaker in the eternal everlasting covenant of mercy and peace with God.

At this time, we can praise and thank His name that we have found forgiveness in Him through the Messiah Yeshua. While some may trust in horses or chariots, we will trust in the name of our God.

“Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.” (Psalms 20:7)

May we lift up our voices and share the good news that we have forgiveness in a wonderful Savior, Yeshua Hamshiach; therefore we may be strong and of good courage as we go through these 'terrible days' and into the last days before Yeshua comes.

Let us continue to preach the good news of the gospel, for as it is written,

“How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?”
(Romans 10:14)



Shabbat shalom! Love Hannah

Vayelech Study Questions

1. How do you think Moses felt about not being allowed to take the people of Israel into the Promised Land? How do you think he handled the situation with such grace and dignity?
2. Has there been a time when someone you depended upon needed to leave you at a crucial time in your life? How did you feel? Has it been your experience that even when people fail or desert us, God is still with us and is all we need? Share and discuss.
3. Have you gone through a change in spiritual leadership of your congregation or group? Did the transition to the new leader go smoothly and well? Or not? Share.
4. Why is strength and courage so necessary for any new endeavor? From where can we receive the strength and courage we need to move forward into the unknown and overcome the challenges we will face?
5. What do the Hebrew words: 'samchut, smicha and samach' mean and how do they relate to one another?
6. Who was Joshua ben Nun and why do you think Moses chose him as his successor even over his own sons? Do you think this was a wise choice?
7. How do we know when to quit? Have you ever seen an example of someone who just didn't know when to quit? What was the result? Do you think you will be able to pass on your God-given mission with grace when the time comes? Share and discuss.
8. What are some of the theories of location of the missing Ark of the Covenant? Do you have your own 'pet theory'? What does it contain that makes its' discovery so precious?
9. What is a kahal (or kehilla)? Why is it so important to believers? Why is isolation dangerous? Have you found a 'kehilla' where you feel that you belong? Discuss.
10. If you have children, how do you teach them the Torah? Share.
11. What is 'tshuvah'? What is the significance of Shabbat Shuva? If we have strayed from God, how can we return to Him?
12. Describe a Tashlich ceremony? What is its significance? Which Scripture is read at this ceremony?

About the Author:

Hannah Neshher 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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