



## AN EXCITING JOURNEY BACK IN TIME...

Rooted in ancient Torah traditions, *The Age of Prophecy* transports you back 3000 years to the epic battle between the Israelite Kings and Prophets. Lev, an orphaned shepherd boy, begins a journey of discovery when he's hired to play as a musician before the prophets. He soon learns that his father's knife holds a deadly secret about his hidden past. As he is drawn deeper into the world of royal politics and prophetic wisdom, Lev fights to unearth his true self while the clouds of war gather around him.

### *About the Authors*



*Dave Mason is a Rabbi, Educator and Business Strategist who loves to delve into the Biblical narrative in search of ancient wisdom. He lives with his family in the eclectic Nachlaot neighborhood of Jerusalem.*

*Mike Feuer is a Rabbi, Historian, and Outdoor Educator specializing in teaching history in context.*

[TheAgeofProphecy.com](http://TheAgeofProphecy.com)



[www.pjourway.org](http://www.pjourway.org)

Sponsored by the Harold Grinspoon Foundation

### **Two quick notes before you start reading:**

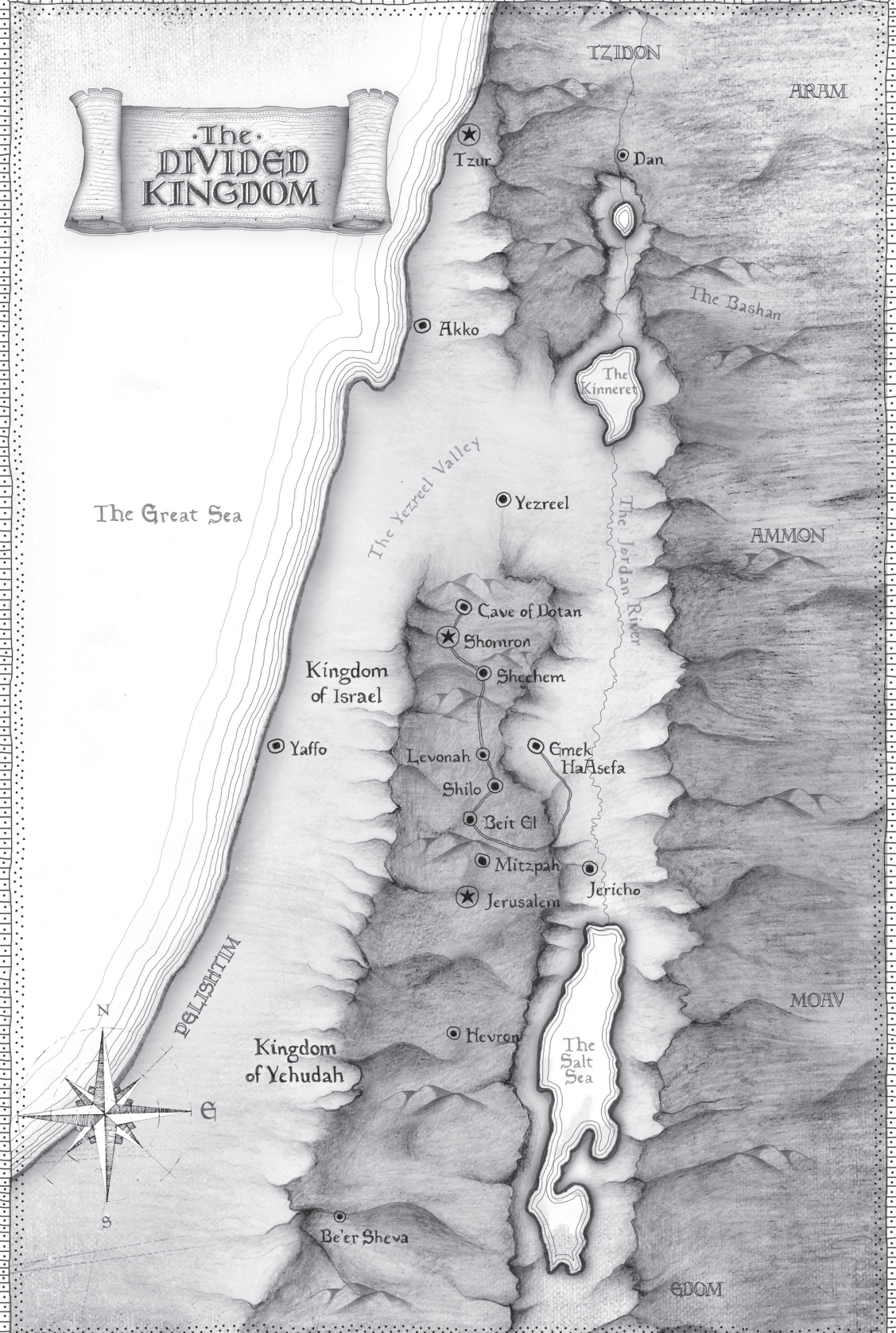
1) We've created an introductory video for anyone who would like more background regarding the world you're about to enter, available at [TheAgeofProphecy.com/video](http://TheAgeofProphecy.com/video).

This video can be viewed at any time. It's not necessary to watch it before beginning. You'll also find both written and video notes on the website providing sources for ideas discussed in the book and deeper insights into key concepts.

2) We are constantly striving to improve the quality of our work as well as the readers' experience. The current publishing revolution not only provides authors previously unknown flexibility, but also allows readers to play a prominent role in the writing process. Accordingly, we've put a feedback form on our site at [TheAgeofProphecy.com/feedback](http://TheAgeofProphecy.com/feedback).

If there is a specific element for which you'd like us to provide an explanatory video, or if there's a passage that you find confusing, or if you find (heaven forbid) a typo, please let us know.

# The DIVIDED KINGDOM



*Hillel said: If I am not for myself, who will be for me? And when I am for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?*

Pirkei Avot 1:14



# *A Shepherd's Inheritance*

*578 Years after the Exodus*

The day before I was taken from my home, I grazed my uncle's flock on a hillside overlooking the path from the King's Road to the gates of Levonah. I sat under an old fig tree, taking shelter from the early summer heat while the sheep ate their fill. I strummed my kinnor, the small harp that was my only valuable possession, while keeping one eye on the sheep and the other on the travelers approaching the town gates for market day.

This was before the breakout of the war, when anyone could safely walk the King's Road, regardless of their loyalties. Many travelers passed me early that morning on their way to the city. Few spared even a glance for me, just a young shepherd boy, and none stopped to talk until my friend Seguv appeared late in the afternoon. The sheep bleated as Seguv drew his donkey off the road and climbed up to my perch. Seguv was only a few years older than me, yet he spent half his time traveling the Kingdom with his brothers. They came to Levonah three or four times a year to sell their father's dates. But this was the first time I ever saw Seguv traveling alone. He approached me with a bounce in his step that told of news.

## THE LAMP OF DARKNESS

The sheep scurried out of his way; strangers frightened them. Yet, Seguv barely noticed. He untied one of his saddlebags and searched through a thick cushion of flax until he pulled out a tiny clay bottle. His eyes sparkled.

"Is that it?" I asked.

Seguv nodded.

"Put just a drop on my hands. I want to feel it."

He gave a sly grin as he pulled the flask away. "A drop of this is worth more than one of your sheep, and it would be worth my head if the King found out. I'll let you smell it only."

I reached out to take the bottle, but Seguv tightened his grip. Only when I dropped my hands did he uncork it and hold it under my nose. The scent contained the sweetness of wildflowers. Then Seguv pulled the flask away and a hot breeze carried the sheep odor back under the fig tree. I opened my eyes, confused. "If it's so precious, why do you have it?"

Seguv's eyes widened, "My father wants the first batch to go directly to the King."

"But why are you taking it?" The roads were safe, and had been ever since the last civil war ended years ago. Even so, who would send a kingly gift with a boy selling dates?

I could tell from the way he smiled, with his tongue between his teeth, that he was just waiting for me to ask. "It's early," he said, raising his thick, dark eyebrows. "This is the first batch of afarsimon oil ever produced in the Kingdom. The King isn't even expecting a crop this year. My father says there's no better time for my first appearance at Court."

Only the most important men in Levonah ever went to the King's Court—I'd never heard of a fourteen-year-old going to Court on his own. But of course, no family in Levonah was as prominent as Seguv's. "So that's why you're making the trip alone?"

"Hmm?" Seguv was hardly listening, his attention focused on returning the bottle to his saddlebag.

"Is that why you're making the trip without your brothers? To win the favor of the Court?"

"Oh." Seguv closed the saddlebag, his hands fumbling with the straps. "I forgot you didn't know." His eyes fell to the ground. "We lost Aviram a few months ago, and now Onan is too sick to travel."

"What happened?" I couldn't help but ask. I pictured Aviram's laughing face. How could he be gone?

Seguv's teary eyes rose to meet mine. "It's the waters in Jericho. Many have died from them, but Father says it won't stop the rebuilding."

## *A Shepherd's Inheritance*

Seguv tied off the last strap of the saddlebag. I wanted to comfort him, but I feared saying the wrong thing. I reached instead for my kinnor—music had soothed my own heart so many times. I closed my eyes and quieted my mind until my fingertips found a new melody, one that I hoped would contain all the compassion that I couldn't put into words.

Seguv's head dropped forward as one, two tears darkened the dry soil at his feet. Seguv mumbled, "Thank you," and then drew his donkey toward the town's gate.

"Go in peace," I called after him, then added, too quietly for him to hear, "and may the Holy One protect you from the waters of Jericho."

I played the melody louder now, eyes closed, soothing my own sorrow at Aviram's death. I only opened my eyes when I heard the approach of footsteps.

An old man approached me, with a young couple from Levonah trailing behind. The old man's leathery face broke into a smile as his gray-blue eyes met mine. He pointed to the trunk of the fig tree, silently asking if he could join me. I nodded in response; this was common land so I had no right to object.

The young couple stopped at the edge of the road. I didn't know them well, but I would never forget their wedding a month before. The bride's father had hired me as a musician, the first time I was ever paid for playing my kinnor. When they stood beneath their wedding canopy, their faces were filled with nervous, joyous energy. Now they stood like stone markers at the edge of the road, waiting as the old man approached me alone.

He sat down slowly but smoothly—not like the old men of Levonah, whose knees creaked and faces groaned as they lowered themselves to the ground. He leaned his back against the fig tree's trunk, pulled in his feet, and raised his knees before him. Were it not for the couple watching from below, I might have thought he sought out the shade for a late afternoon nap. His head sank between his bent knees. He sat perfectly still.

I still plucked away at my kinnor, even as I watched a butterfly land on his elbow. A moment later the butterfly took flight in a flash of orange as the old man shuddered. The hairs on the back of my neck stood up as a charge filled the air, like lightning during a storm. The old man's bent back trembled and his hands flapped against the ground. Was he having a fit? Should I stop playing? Yet, my fingers kept plucking until my fingernail caught on one of the strings, slicing it in two.

The trembling stopped just as abruptly as it began. The old man's back slowly straightened. Without a word, the stranger stood. He raised his aged hand and extended his hand toward the couple waiting by the side of the road. "Come," he called to them.

## THE LAMP OF DARKNESS

The young man and woman rushed up the slope to meet him. Only once they stood beside him did I notice how very tall he was, standing a head above the younger man. The old man called out, "It rolled behind the wine barrel at the back of the house, and there it lies—dirty, but perfectly safe."

The woman put a hand to her chest, as a relieved smile came across her face. Her husband said, "Now I know you are truly a Seer. Shall we escort you back to the city?"

"I remain here with the boy. Go in peace with the blessings of the Holy One."

"Peace and blessings upon you, Master Uriel," the young man said, taking his wife's hand and starting back toward the town gates.

The old man turned his blue-gray eyes on mine. "It's time to water the sheep and lock them in for the evening. I will come home with you, Lev. I need to speak with your uncle."

I gathered my things, wondering, "How does he know my name?"



The King's tower, empty of soldiers during these times of peace, cast a shadow across our small farm by the time we returned home. My evening chores went slower than usual as I kept turning to watch the conversation between my uncle and the old man. I didn't finish filling the watering trough and securing the pen until darkness began to fall.

The rocky spring behind our farm was normally dry by early summer, but this year a trickle remained due to heavy, late winter storms. Farmers had cursed these late rains, which soaked the barley crop, causing much of it to spoil before it could be stored. But I felt only gratitude now as the stream of cool water ran over my curly brown hair and washed the sweat off my lean body.

It was nearly fully dark when I came inside. The evening meal was mostly over, and Aunt Leah had already taken her three youngest children up the ladder for bed. Only Uncle Menachem and his two oldest children, Dahlia and Eliav, remained at the table. I dipped my bread in salted cheese, chewing quickly because it was so late. My mind was still on the old man, but as my uncle said nothing, I didn't ask. When I finished eating, Dahlia rose to clean up while Eliav and I remained at the table for our nightly studies.

"And you shall sanctify the fiftieth year," Uncle Menachem began, chanting a verse from the Torah that he had memorized as a child, "and proclaim freedom in the land for all who dwell in it." Eliav and I echoed him, repeating not only the words but also the melody of his chant. "It will be a Yovel for you," my uncle continued. "You shall return each man to his ancestral land, and return

## *A Shepherd's Inheritance*

each man to his family.”

“It will be a Yovel for you,” we repeated. “You shall return each man to his ancestral land...” Dahlia, cleaning in the kitchen, pushed a stubborn, red curl away from her eyes and coughed. “...and return each man to his family.” The cough was our signal. She had a question.

“Uncle?”

“Yes, Lev?”

The problem was, I never knew exactly what was bothering Dahlia. “When is the next Yovel?” Silence from the kitchen—I’d guessed right.

Uncle Menachem ran his fingers through his beard. “I asked my father the same question when he taught me this verse.”

“And what did he tell you?”

“That he had never seen a Yovel.”

“Have you seen one?”

“No, Lev.”

I gripped the edge of the table to contain my excitement. “Then the next one must be coming soon!”

Uncle Menachem shifted on his stool. “No, Lev. My father was older than fifty when he died. Do not put your hope in the Yovel; it is not coming. The land will not be returned.” He rose to his feet, though we had recited just one verse. “That’s enough for tonight. It’s already late. Lev, see that the flock is secure and then get to sleep.”

I bit my lip hard enough to taste blood. I ought to know better than to get excited over the Yovel. It was just another silly daydream. I grabbed my kinnor on my way out. I tugged at the gate of the sheep pen, testing that it was well fastened, then walked around the edge of the wall, feeling for fallen stones.

I lifted a flat rock at the edge of the pen, withdrawing a leather pouch from the hole beneath. After a month in the cool earth, my new strings were ready. I sat on the ground with my back against the pen’s low wall, and ran my hand across the top of the kinnor until I found the empty spot. I threaded one end of the sheep gut string through the hole in the olive wood frame and wound the bottom end around its groove at the base of the kinnor. I began to stretch and tune, stretch and tune, searching for the right sound to match the other strings. When the eight notes were in harmony, I ran my fingers lightly across all eight strings, letting the voice of the kinnor ripple out into the night.

This was my favorite time of day, when I could be alone with my music. But tonight the music had barely taken hold when a voice broke my focus.

“You must have questions about today,” Uncle Menachem said, standing above me in the starlight.



I silenced the strings of the kinnor and stood up. "Yes, Uncle."

"Did you recognize that old man?"

"No, Uncle, but he knew my name."

"His name is Master Uriel. He is a navi, a prophet."

I recalled Uriel's trembling beneath the fig tree, and the couple with their missing item. Was that prophecy? Is that how he knew my name?

"Do you know why he has come?" my uncle asked.

My uncle had taught me that silence is a fence for wisdom, so I kept my mouth shut and shook my head.

"The prophets have called a gathering in Emek HaAsefa and they need musicians. Master Uriel would like to hire you."

"Hire me? How long is the gathering?"

"Two months."

"Two months?" I hadn't slept even a single night away from home since coming to live with my uncle. "I can't leave for that long—what about the flock?"

"Eliav can look after them. He's ten now, the same age you were when you first took them out alone."

My breath came short. "What did you tell him?"

"I won't refuse a navi, Lev. Not without reason."

I said nothing. If having me at home wasn't reason enough, what could I say?

"This will be good for you," Uncle Menachem said, speaking fast. "It won't be long until you're of age, and..." he reached beneath his cloak and pulled out a small pouch, tipping the contents into his hand, "...look here."

It was too dark to make out more than shadows, but I heard the unmistakable sound as my uncle emptied the pouch: the clink of copper. I reached out, my fingers finding the heap of cold metal—there must have been thirty pieces at least. "Whose are these?"

"These are mine, but I weighed them out according to Master Uriel's word. You will receive the same amount at the end of the gathering." He dropped the pieces back into the pouch one by one, each piece ringing in the dark as it fell.

"So many..."

"Enough for a ram and three ewes, with some left over." He tightened the leather strap at the top of the pouch, tying it shut. "It's a shepherd's inheritance."

I flinched as the word fell between us: inheritance. "Uncle, tell me again what happened to my father's land."

Uncle Menachem crossed his arms and sighed. "It's as I've told you, Lev. Your inheritance was lost to the King in the civil war. Do not dwell on what was lost. The Yovel is not coming. Your inheritance will not be returned." He put his hand on my shoulder. "The Land is wide enough for all of us, if we

## *A Shepherd's Inheritance*

each find our place.”

I nodded, but knew I had no place. My uncle cared for me like his own, but his land would pass to his sons, not his nephew. I didn't even know where my father's fields were. It had been foolish to get excited about the Yovel—just another false hope.

“When you return from the gathering, we can start building you a flock of your own.” He held the sealed pouch of copper in the palm of his hand, as if weighing it. “If that's still what you'll want.”

I strained my eyes to read his expression, but it was too dark. Shepherding was the best profession for one without land—my uncle had taught me this from my earliest memory. “Why wouldn't I want that?”

“I'm...I'm sure you will,” he said, avoiding my eyes. “You should take that pouch of spare strings with you and get to bed. It's late and you have a long journey tomorrow.” He squeezed my shoulder—which was as much affection as my uncle ever showed—and turned back toward the house.

I lifted the flat rock and retrieved the pouch again. When I stood straight, I found Dahlia sitting on the wall of the pen. “So what does the old man want?”

I sat down next to her. “Weren't you listening?”

“Just tell me.”

“He needs a musician for a gathering.”

“For how long?”

“Two months.”

Dahlia let out a low whistle. “Are you going?”

“Yes.”

“Now you won't have to stop travelers to tell me stories of the Kingdom. You can see it for yourself.”

I slid away from Dahlia. “Those are other people's stories.”

“They don't have to be.” She touched me gently on the cheek, bringing my eyes to hers. Dahlia was the opposite of her father—too affectionate. It was fine when we were kids—we were raised like brother and sister—but now we were both nearly of age. Soon we'd be separated, and all her affection would only make it harder. “What's bothering you?”

Dahlia kept pushing me; she always did. “Your father didn't give me a choice.”

“What did he say?”

“He said it would be good for me, but I know what he meant.”

“What?”

I tapped my thumb against the frame of my kinnor, distracting myself enough to keep my voice calm. “That I have to find my place elsewhere because

I have no land and can't inherit from him."

Dahlia pulled her hair away from her eyes, tucking a particularly obstinate curl behind her ear. "Neither can I."

"It's different for you. Your father will marry you to Shelah or someone else with land."

Dahlia said nothing, just stared toward the property of our unmarried neighbor and shuddered. She was younger than me, but would come of age first, reaching her twelfth birthday in less than six months. There was no telling how long her father would wait before seeking a match for her.

"I'll be thirteen in less than a year," I continued, still not looking at her. "Without land, I'll have no choice but to become a shepherd, following the grasses from pasture to pasture."

"You won't have to leave here when you come of age."

"Not right away, but your father's already sending me away so I can earn enough copper to start a flock. It won't be more than three years until it's too big to keep here."

"Where will you go then?"

I stared at the hills to the east. "To the edge of the wilderness, away from the villages."

"That's so far. When would we see you?"

I shrugged. "A shepherd doesn't just leave his flock." That was true, but there were other truths that Dahlia, who clung to her dreams as if they were the morning sun, refused to accept. Even when I did visit, I might not see her, and we'd certainly never be allowed to be alone like this.

Dahlia tugged her knees to her chest. "You don't know what will be in three years' time."

A fire burned in my chest. "You think I'll inherit my father's land? Your father already told me it won't be returned—I don't even know where it is. What will be different in three years?"

"I..." Dahlia's eyes glistened in the starlight. "I don't know, but when you come home—"

"What's going to change when I come home?"

"Well, if the Yovel is not coming—"

"If the Yovel is not coming, my land will never be returned."

Dahlia shook her head. "If the Yovel is not coming, then any land you buy will be yours forever."

I gave a bitter laugh. "Do you know how many years I'd have to herd a flock just to buy a small piece of rocky hillside? It's better not to dream at all."

"Is it?" Dahlia also had a fire in her—we were of the same blood, after all.

## *A Shepherd's Inheritance*

"This morning you thought you were stuck in Levonah, and tomorrow you're leaving with the old man. You never know what can happen."

"His name is Master Uriel," I said. "There's something strange about him."

"He's a navi. My mother told me."

The memory of him saying my name on the hillside brought a feeling of dread. "There's something more."

Dahlia lowered her voice and leaned in. "Your eyes were so dark when you came home. What was bothering you?" That was the annoying part about Dahlia: she could always tell my moods so easily. She always said that my amber eyes would darken to match my thoughts. Yet, how could I tell her about my unease? She would only tell me to trust my heart.

I kept my voice low. "Your father knows more than he says."

Dahlia sighed and lay down on the broad, stone wall of the pen. "The stars are bright tonight."

"What do you think he's hiding?"

"Look at the stars, Lev. Aren't they beautiful?"

"Why don't you answer me?"

"I'm trying to." Dahlia pushed me lightly with her bare foot. "Look at the stars. Whatever's going to happen is already written there. It doesn't matter what my father's hiding; he didn't give you a choice."

I pushed her foot away, but turned my eyes upwards. "No, he didn't."

"Try to remember everything you see at the gathering. I want to hear all about it when you get back—it will give me something to look forward to."



I woke to the drumming of my heart. My forehead was clammy with sweat and my breath came fast. It was my old nightmare. How long had it been since the last time? A month? When I was younger, it woke me night after night. Yet, as hard as I tried, I could never remember even a single detail.

I pulled my tunic over my head in the faint dawn light—today wasn't a day to dwell on dreams. I arranged my few belongings on my sheepskin sleeping mat: the extra strings, my shepherd's pouch. Together with my kinnor, sandals, and tunic, this was all I owned. I started rolling them in a bundle when something heavy dropped on the mat.

"This was your father's knife," Uncle Menachem whispered, trying not to wake the younger children. "I intended to give it to you when you came of age, but it may serve you well on your journey."

My fingers trembled as I picked up the knife. The stone of the handle felt

smooth in my hand. I brought the knife up to the high, square window that offered the only light in our sleeping loft. The sheath pulled off with a tug, revealing a blade that was flint rather than iron, and a full two handbreadths long. I had never seen one like it. A copper inlay decorated the hilt, with a design showing two claws with three toes each, the inner toe of each claw gently touching.

A lump blocked my throat. My father had held this knife.

“Lev...” My uncle sounded far away, but there was a strange tone in his voice that got my attention. “The prophets are the chief servants of the Holy One. They mean only good; I believe that.” He looked as if he was about to say more, but then turned to go so quickly that I had no chance to respond.

I watched him climb down the ladder. I sheathed the knife, added it to the pile on the mat, rolled it up and tied it together.

I descended the ladder to find Aunt Leah standing before the hearth. “Sit down and eat before you go,” she said. There was a plate on the table with cheese and my special bread. Ever since I could remember, she always set aside the first piece of bread baked each day for me.

“Thank you, Aunt Leah,” I said, then quickly washed my hands and sat down without meeting her gaze.

She sat opposite me, watching me eat, her eyes tinged with red.

I ate quickly, mostly as an excuse to keep my attention on my food. The bread disappeared, but other than rubbing her eyes with the back of her hands, my aunt didn’t budge. There was no use putting it off; she wasn’t going to let me leave without talking. Without looking up, I said, “You don’t want me to go, do you, Aunt Leah?”

Tears ran down her cheeks and she forced a half-smile. “Yes, I do.”

My eyes rose up to meet hers. “You do?”

“I do.” She wiped the tears with her palm. “Menachem said you were too young, but I told him you were ready.”

So my uncle hadn’t wanted me going—that explained his reluctance. “If you want me to go, then why are you crying?”

She smiled, as two more tears spilled over her cheeks. “Hasn’t your uncle taught you that more than the lamb wants to drink, the ewe wants to give milk?”

I just stared back. Why was she suddenly talking about the flock?

Aunt Leah laughed, releasing more tears. “You don’t understand now, but when you’re blessed with children you will. You’re my sister’s son, but you know you’re the same to me as one of my own, don’t you Lev?”

A wet stinging filled my eyes—I hoped my aunt didn’t notice. “Yes, Aunt Leah.”

## *A Shepherd's Inheritance*

"And no matter what happens, you'll always have a home here."

I nodded—no words would come.

There was a soft knock.

My aunt rose and opened the door. Uriel stood a little way off, his back to us, leaving us the space to say goodbye. Aunt Leah held me in a tight embrace. I took a final glance at my home over her shoulder as I hugged her back, my eyes open and dry. Though I was destined to return, I would always remember this as the moment that I left home for good.