

Shemot                      Names                      When the Time is Right

Torah:                      Ex. 1:1-6:1

(1) **1:17:** *But the midwives feared G-d and did not do what the king commanded, they let the children live.* I wish more people would fear G-d and stop the worldwide slaughter of innocents, who are not even given the chance to live long enough to be born. A world without the fear of G-d ends up falling under His wrath. Oops, have I just summarized human history over the centuries as we wait for the time to be right and the Kingdom to finally come?

(2) **2:5, 6:** *The daughter of Pharaoh came down to the river to bathe and her companions walked along the banks of the river. She noticed the basket among the reeds and she sent her servant to retrieve it. She opened it and saw the child. It was a little boy who was crying and she had pity on him and said this one of the Hebrew children.* Jews have been hidden by people over the centuries when our enemies have tried to kill us. When the time was right, G-d brought this lady to make sure the deliverer of the House of Jacob would be raised out of harms way. It is always G-d who is in final control over our lives and not our enemies. We need to come up with various creative ways to protect ourselves, knowing full well that our safety is guaranteed by our G-d and not by our own efforts.

(3) **3:14:** *G-d said again to Moses: you shall speak thus to the Children of Israel: YHVH, the G-d of your Fathers, the G-d of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob has sent me to you. This shall be my name for all eternity, behold my name from generation to generation.* The name YHVH was used by the author of the Torah from the beginning of the document, but this is the first time the people were given access to it. When the time was right, the people were told who their G-d was and what He is like. He is the One who is and is who He will always be and is who He has always been. When the time was right, G-d showed Himself to me. How about you?

(4) **5:9:** *Let these people be loaded up with more work so that they no longer give heed to lying words.* The enemy of our souls will always try and convince us and the world that the Word of G-d is a lie. As long as it is not a lie to us, then the time will always be right for us to have faith and to obey, even if this obedience and faith gets us into trouble with the world. I would always rather be in trouble with the world, rather than in trouble with G-d. How about you?

Haftarah:                      Is. 27:6-28:13; 29:22-23; Jer. 1:1-2:3

(5) **27:6:** *In the times to come, Jacob shall take root and Israel shall blossom and sent forth shoots and he shall fill the world with his fruit.* Israel has always known that when the time is right, her Messiah shall fill the world. Is He filling your world?

(6) **28:2: He said to them: this is the rest, let the one who is tired rest. Behold the place of rest! But they did not want to listen.** Spiritual restlessness is a too common affliction that most people refuse to deal with or never around to dealing with. The rest is there and is not going away. Have you found it? Is it the place where you live?

Brit Chadashah: I Cor. 14:13-25

(7) **14:15: What shall I do? I will pray by the Spirit and I will pray with understanding. I will sing by the Spirit and I will sign with understanding.** There is a time to understand and there is a time to just trust the L-rd. The Spirit helps us with utterances we cannot articulate and as long as we understand that He is in charge, we will know that this always brings us to the place when the time is right.

(Sharon, pp.111,113) **Ps. 99** Jewish Hero: Zachariah

Today is the last Shabbat before Christmas and as the silly season moves into full swing, I thought it would be appropriate for us to examine how Messianic Jewish and Gentile believers ought to celebrate Christmas. Before I do, I would like to make three comments about our need or our choice to celebrate or to abstain from celebrating; for many believers since the time of the Reformation have objected to both the festivities and to the festival itself.

You see, since the time Christmas first began to be celebrated, it has gathered a collection of various traditions, myths and customs which either enrich or impoverish the original purposes of the festival. Everything from special food and special decorations to legends, like the one in England which says that all the animals can talk on Christmas Eve at midnight.

This leaves us with three options when it comes to deciding about keeping the season. As believers we need to acknowledge the birth of the Saviour and if we object to Christmas, shouldn't we establish another day to acknowledge this blessed event?

We are not required to celebrate the L-rd's birth, but since the arrival of the Messiah is the most important event in the Scriptures, we need to distinguish between our objections as to when and how Christmas is celebrated and our need to acknowledge His birth as an actual event that forever changed the course of human history.

Next we need to be sure that we do not let the abuse or excesses of the celebration and the way it is twisted and secularized – and even paganized, prevent us from acknowledging His birth. His birth is dealt with at greater length than any other birth in the entire Scriptures and we cannot ignore its importance. Just because our society tries every year to take the Christ out of Christmas, why should we let them take Christmas away from us?

Lastly, as long as we know the reason for the season, why can't we rise upon the massive retail sales, the endless nonsensical specials and ridiculous parades.

I may be an old guy with a white beard and sometimes it feels like I live at the North Pole, but my bag of tricks does not include spying on children and bribing their good behaviour with the promise of toys delivered by genetically altered flying reindeer and that are magically beamed into living rooms through chimneys.

And lets not forget those Christmas parties where we are supposed to forgive the way we are treated all year and pretend that we are friends with people who really feel the same way about us that we feel about them, even though nothing is going to change after the party is over.

I want to keep the L-rd as the focus of the season and make sure that all that I do and all that I refuse to do reflects a biblical orientation to celebrating what is for some the most wonderful time of the year. There is a very real spiritual tension surrounding the celebration of Christmas, and I feel it has two main targets.

First of all the enemy of our souls wants to change the season into a secular celebration of greed where every effort is made to remove any spiritual or religious significance from Christmas – and he is doing a pretty good job. Next, he is trying to get believers not to celebrate the festival and to prevent us from building into our lives an annual celebration of the Saviour's birth – and again he is doing a pretty good job.

There are three elements which I feel should be considered the basis of a Messianic Jewish approach to the celebration of Christmas, despite all the foolishness which annually tries to pollute, pervert and even prevent Christmas from coming to Narnia.

First of all Christmas has a strong biblical basis – I've already said that four entire chapters of the Bible are given over to the longest birth narratives in the Bible.

Secondly Christmas has a strong historical basis with no pagan origins.

Lastly, Christmas has a strong outreach imperative, where it is entirely appropriate and even politically correct to share the Gospel and to challenge people to receive the babe into their hearts with at least as much fanfare as they put into acknowledging His birth.

Let me deal first with the biblical basis for Christmas.

The Bible records seven categories of people who were told about the birth of the Saviour.

Here they are: (1) His uncle Zachariah (who was speechless), (2) His aunt Elizabeth (whose baby sensed His cousin from the womb), (3) His mother (who is the second Eve), (4) His father (who knew it was not his child), (5) the temple shepherds (who flocked to see Him, lol), (6) The Magi (who guided both by a star [or a heavenly body of some kind, perhaps a comet] and warned by a dream and whose gifts spell out the Gospel) and (7) the tzadik (righteous man) Simeon and the prophetess Anna.

Where and when He was born are dealt with clearly in the Scriptures and the special circumstances of the census which protected Him at His birth are also forcefully outlined in the Scriptures, as are up to 320 prophecies which proclaimed the details of how this Babe would bring eternal salvation into the world. The idea of Christmas has a firm biblical basis and is not of pagan origin – how can the celebration of the birth of the Saviour of the world be of pagan origin?

Lets look next at the historical basis for Christmas and it is quite strong. It did not begin as some kind of winter solstice celebration called Saturnalia which was highjacked by early believers.

Saturnalia was an Italian celebration and not well known outside of the Roman homeland until well after Christmas an established celebration. Also, Saturnalia was always celebrated on the 21st of December – which is today - and was never observed on the 25th of December. Christmas may have adopted and modified some pre-Christian observances of the Saturnalia, but it is not of pagan origin and does not have its roots in any pagan celebration.

Where did the date come from? Most ancient people had their own calendar and the Jewish people came to believe that the Messiah would be born on one of the three fast days which commemorate the destruction of Solomon's temple and the first of them, the Fast of the 10th of Tevet was observed last Friday, on the 13th of December. We know that the Jewish calendar is a solar lunar calendar and the dates migrate a few weeks on the secular calendar from year to year. Dec. 25th coincides with the 10th of Tevet several times a century and on the older versions of Roman calendars this correlation may have been more frequent.

Alfred Edersheim demonstrates at length in his huge book, ***the Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah***, that Messianic believers were already celebrating Christmas before the Gentiles took over the celebration and the birth narratives of Matthew and Luke as well as the first chapter of John, are set up as a series of readings for a Christmas liturgy – and this usage has survived in the gentile church today.

There is no evidence for another date and the census under Quirinius could not have occurred during the annual festival cycle when Jews were heading to Jerusalem and would not have been willing to return to their places of birth. There is enough historical detail which joins with the biblical material to indicate not only that the festival was initiated by believers, but that the 25th of December is the right date for the celebration.

Let me conclude my meditation by mentioning the strong outreach imperative which Christmas has for believers. Instead of spending our time telling people that the festival is a pagan one and is celebrated at the wrong date, why not spend our time taking advantage of season to share the story of salvation with people?

Manger scenes are just as popular as Christmas trees and the meaning of His birth is celebrated in countless Christmas carols, so why should we attack when and how the festival is celebrated?

Isn't it strange that some Christians have stopped celebrating Christmas when most unbelievers still enjoy it as their favourite time of the year?

It has a strong biblical basis, both in the birth narratives and in the Messianic prophecies.

It has a strong historical basis and while it may have picked up some pagan elements, it has no pagan origins and there is good historical evidence that Dec. 25th is the right date.

It is also one of two times a year where we can talk about our faith in the Messiah and not be accused of being intrusive or politically incorrect. The other one is Easter.

However you choose to celebrate Christmas, or even if you choose to ignore it, make sure your reason for how you deal with the season deals all three essential elements of the season I have dealt with today. Let it be based on solid biblical conviction. Let it be based on solid historical evidence. Let it be based on a solid commitment to outreach.

His birth is the most important event in the Scriptures, because without it, His life, death, resurrection and return would not be possible.

He is the greatest gift imaginable (John 3:16) and His Spirit is the true spirit of Christmas and our lives of faith become more amazing stories than all and any secular Christmas specials because of the impact the little Babe who was born in a manger continues to have on our lives.

How is the Babe continuing to impact your life?

I have even designed a Messianic Jewish Christmas greeting: Chag Yom Yeshua (happy blessed Jesus day).

May the true reason for the season bless you and be the reason you celebrate at every season of the year. And if you choose not to celebrate His birth on Dec. 25th, may this blessed event, His birth, continue to guide you more clearly than the star guided the Magi, because our Messiah is the true bright and morning star.

May you walk in the light as He is in the light and may it cause all and any darkness to be dispelled in your heart and life until that great day when His kingdom shall come and all darkness and foolishness shall forever be removed.

Let's pray.