

Shemot	Names	The Life and Times of Moses
Torah:	Exodus 1:1-6:1	
Haftarah:	Isaiah 27:6-28:13; 29:22, 23	Jeremiah 1:1-2:3
Brit Chadashah:	I Corinthians 14:13-25	

This longer portion covers a number of stories. There is first a regime change in Egypt and the first attempted genocide of the Jewish people. This is followed by the birth of Moses and his flight to Midian after he murders an Egyptian. Then there is his initial encounter with YHVH and his call to return to Egypt to deliver Israel from her bondage. It ends with Pharaoh's initial refusal to let the people go and the battle lines are drawn for a showdown between YHVH and the gods of Egypt.

After the death of Joseph, a new Egyptian regime arises that did not recognize the special status which Joseph had acquired for his people. This new regime was afraid that the growing Jewish population would soon outnumber them and in a time of war, might be liable to join with Egypt's enemies and then leave the country. They did not want to lose this valuable source of free manpower. At various times in the history of Egypt, foreign regimes ruled the country and their grip on power was always tenuous and they had to make sure that they dealt with any challenges to their power before they became a problem.

However, the more cruelty they used against the Jews, the more their population grew. In frustration they first decreed that the midwives murder every Jewish boy at birth. In our world, we perpetrate a similar form of murder, only these days we kill the babies before they are born. When this did not work, they decreed that all new born boys had to be drowned in the Nile. When evil governments decree things that oppose the Word of YHVH, we do not have to obey them. We do not always have real freedom of conscience, but are determined to govern our lives according to the teachings of the Bible.

Moses' mother comes up with a unique solution when her baby grew too big and loud to hide in her home. She puts him in a reed basket and hides him among the rushes that grew on the edge of the river. The rushes were usually full of noisy birds who would mask the noise of the baby crying. When one of Pharaoh's daughters came down to the river to bathe, the birds would have suddenly grown silent and the baby was discovered. His own mother is hired to care for him until he is weaned and he is then taken into the household of Pharaoh's daughter.

This likely did not make him a potential heir to the throne, as Pharaoh had any number of wives and daughters, but it did mean that he grew up in safety. He knew he was Hebrew and when he killed an Egyptian who was beating a Hebrew, he had to flee, once the crime was made known. He had to leave Egyptian controlled territory and took refuge with the family of Jethro, a priest of Midian.

As he was working as a shepherd, he went into the hills around Mount Sinai (Horeb) where he encounters a burning bush that did not appear to be burning the bush. YHVH speaks to Moses out of the fire and charges him with the mission of leading the Hebrews to this mountain, in the first stage of their eventual return to the Land of Canaan.

At least twice, Moses tries to refuse the mission and the second time, he loses the priesthood to the children of his older brother, Aaron. YHVH says that His name is "I Am" (yahveh) and Moses is sent to Egypt with the ability to perform at least two miracles. He is warned that it may be a long process, but that in the end, the Jews will be chased out of the country after gaining possession of much Egyptian treasure. Aaron is told to meet his brother at Mount Sinai and Moses gets permission from his father-in-law to embark on this dangerous mission.

He has two sons at this point, but from the account, we learn that only one of them is circumcised. This was a dangerous breach of the covenant which G-d made with Israel and when they stopped for the night, YHVH sought to kill Moses for this terrible infraction. His wife, Tziporah saves Moses' life by immediately circumcising her son.

Moses and Aaron return to Egypt and gather the elders of the people, who see the signs and believe that Moses has come to lead them out of bondage. In their first appearance before Pharaoh, Moses and Aaron warn him that if he does not let the Hebrews go into the wilderness to make sacrifices to YHVH, Egypt will be struck with all kinds of plagues and even suffer loss by the sword.

Pharaoh refuses Moses' petition and calls in the supervisors who have been established by the Egyptians to make sure the Hebrews got their work done. They are told not to listen to the lies which Moses is speaking and they are punished for even listening to them and not either turning Moses over to the Egyptians or expelling him from their community. They are engaged in making bricks for a massive building program, but now they will no longer be given straw to make the bricks. They have to settle for chaff and from that point on the bricks were not of the same quality.

In some Egyptian ruins, there is a marked decline in the quality of bricks. Even with the extra work, the people are beaten when they fall behind on producing the daily required number of bricks. The supervisors complain to Pharaoh, but find no sympathy for the increase in their workload. These supervisors next appear before Moses and say that he has put a sword in Pharaoh's hand to kill them.

They are not the same group as the elders, but they accuse Moses of needlessly angering Pharaoh, who shows no intention of letting them go. Rather than risking any more of Pharaoh's wrath, they would rather work as slaves than risk being killed by listening to Moses. Moses listens to their complaints and takes them before YHVH. He asks why YHVH has not immediately delivered His people.

He is assured that Pharaoh will be so roughly treated by YHVH, that he will chase the people out of his land with a mighty hand. In other words, hold on and buckle up, because you ain't seen nothing yet! It is not going to be a quick process.

G-d's deliverance follows a different agenda which can never be stopped and which is never late. Any impatience on our part is foolish, because YHVH has always been faithful to His Word and has always done what He said He would. It may not be done in the way we would expect and not according to the timing we would wish, but His redemptive purposes, both for His people and for all peoples, are moving towards their fulfillment and can never be stopped or even slowed down. We may be chased, beaten and even killed, but the glory of His kingdom marches on. How well is it marching in your life?

Sermon: The Right Place, The Right Time and The Right Family.

Passage: "For a child has been born for us, a son given to us, authority rests on his shoulders and he is named: Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty G-d, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." (Isaiah 9:5, 6)

As believers, we should acknowledge the reality of Messiah's birth over 2,000 years ago. It is an actual event which happened in time and space, even if it has become surrounded by strange legends and weird traditions. The idea of Christmas is valid and should not be disputed, but we need to avoid all the non biblical nonsense and the pagan symbolism which has been developed over the centuries. We should also refuse to give in the materialism and commercialism which makes this time of the year the biggest retail event of the year – up to 40% of all retail sales occur over this season. For many, tis is the season to go shopping until most of the retail shelves are empty and what is left is snapped up during Boxing Week.

We do not know exactly when early Messianic believers began celebrating Christmas, but the birth narratives in both Matthew and Luke appear to have been set up as Lessons to be read as part of a service of commemoration. There is more detail given about the events surrounding our Messiah's birth than any other birth narratives in the Bible.

From historical accounts, we know that the celebration occurred on the 10th of Tevet, because this was the date for his birth. It was one of the three fasts associated with the destruction of the first temple and the date on the Jewish calendar frequently coincides with the Gentile date, the 25th of December. I am aware of the heated debates around this being the wrong date, but those who challenge it have neither any biblical or historical basis for doing so.

Herod would never have conducted a census during the festival cycle (March or April through September or October) and on Sukkoth, Jews did their best to go up to Jerusalem for the week of this celebration. Going home to the town or city of their birth was never part of any Jewish or biblical celebration.

When Mary and Joseph arrived in Bethlehem, there was no room in the Inn and she gave birth in a stable and laid the baby down in a manger or cattle feeding trough. It has been suggested that the stable was a cave and the manger may have been a stone trough and not a wooden one. John the Baptist's mother had already acknowledged that the child which was growing in Mary's womb was the Messiah of promise, even if His birth occurred in very humble circumstances. At least the stable would have been warm and safe.

Special temple shepherds who were keeping the sacrificial sheep in the fields around Jerusalem, paid the Babe a visit shortly after His birth. They had heard the mighty angelic announcement of this amazing event and wanted to see with their own eyes. They did not see a royal child born into a palace and surrounded by adoring courtiers, but they understood that this little baby was Emmanuel or G-d with us.

When our Messiah left heaven and grew into full humanity in Mary's womb, no place on earth could have been glorious enough for the most amazing King who ever came into the world. Our passage in Isaiah outlines five characteristics of Messiah's deity and while the package may not have been very fancy, its contents were incredible beyond anything which could be imagined. He wasn't coming to be treated specially and His task was anything but pleasant.

He was the Babe born into a manger so that He could grow up into a Man and die on the cross for the sins of all the nations and generations of mankind. Once He accomplished His task and rose from the dead and ascended back into heaven, He is now surrounded by the Heavenly adoration reserved for G-d Himself. Once He returns and dissolves this fading universe, this same Heavenly adoration will be set up forever on a new earth and in a new Heavens.

At Christmas, we celebrate the first stage in His amazing mission and a study of the Scriptures reveals that He was born in the Right place, at the Right time and into the Right family. He was born of the House of David, but not into the line of succession from Solomon, which was eventually disqualified., He descends from Solomon's brother, Nathan, whose lineage did not engage in criminal acts of idolatry and oath breaking.

There is a silly Catholic legend which says that from the time of at least Noah, or perhaps back into the time of Adam, there was a sinless strand of humanity which allowed for what is called the immaculate conception, giving Messiah a sinless body through His sinless mother. Mary was a good person from a good family, but she possessed Adam's nature along with all of humanity. She may be considered a second Eve because she gave birth to the snake crusher, but she did not possess a sinless nature.

Messiah took on Adam's fallen nature and lived a totally sinless life and He took this spiritual victory with Him when He died on the cross. He was the perfect, sinless and flawless Lamb of G-d who won eternal life for believers and when we are indwelt by His Spirit, He can help us to win our personal victory over the sin which so easily overtakes us. He was sinless by choice and not by nature, which makes His life and death and resurrection even more special.

In Isaiah, He is called Wonderful (Pele – miracle worker worthy of praise). This is a term which applies to G-d and is not used when referring to mere human beings. He is called the wonderful (G-d) and should never be considered merely a man. The Heavens declare the glory of G-d and the firmament demonstrates the work of His Hands. They are referring to Pele who was born in our midst as a simple baby.

He always possessed His divine nature and adopted a human nature. His human nature completed the work of salvation and His divine nature applies it to all the nations and generations of mankind, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. He was quite an exceptional baby and the only one who was ever worthy of praise.

Next, He is called Counsellor (ya'ats - - guide). He is the wisdom of G-d which dwelt in that little baby. We are not talking about mere mathematical or philosophical guidance. This kind of guidance identifies the way back to G-d and helps mankind find it. He did not activate His divine nature while He walked among us and it was only revealed once, on the Mount of Transfiguration. The divine nature of this child is that of G-d and has existed from before the foundation of time. Messiah is G-d in a temple of flesh.

Isaiah also calls the child Mighty G-d (el gibbor) and since there is only one G-d, Messiah is that one G-d. He is described as the Mighty G-d because there never was any weakness in Him. Meekness is not weakness but great strength under control. While He was in the wilderness, the enemy tried to get Him to reveal His deity prematurely, which would have required the destruction of Creation and a new start from scratch.

In His human form, Messiah overcame the enemy, without having to rely on His divinity. He did this by using the Scriptures. When we study and quote the Scriptures, we are also accessing the power of G-d. Our G-d is not a feeble G-d and our Messiah was not a feeble Messiah. He fulfilled His mission flawlessly and can show us how to fulfill ours, as we grow in the gifts and the fruit of the Spirit.

I find the portrayal of Yeshua as gentle Jesus meek and mild, to be offensive. He was meek, but not mild or colourless or bland. He spoke with authority, even when those who listened to Him, did not like what He was saying. He was not politically correct and did not do His best not to offend anyone. When He corrected His followers and people like the Samaritan woman by the well, He did so without being rude or harsh. He simply spoke the truth of G-d's Word and if people took exception, that never stopped Him from speaking and from doing what He was called to do.

We should do the same. I do not go out of my way to be offensive to those I disagree with, be it on religious grounds or on moral grounds. I would never recommend harming someone who I disagreed with, even if their theology was completely rotten and totally wrong. I would not call for violence against the Gay community – what do they call it now? The LGBTQRYZ? Infrequently we have had gay people visit our congregation and while I take a firm stance against all and any forms of sexual perversion, I would not be rude and I will not be dragged into an angry confrontation.

One gay man tried to get me to argue after one of our Yom Kippur services, but I did not get riled and I did not flair up. He knew my position and I knew his and if he had wanted a respectful conversation, we could have had our conversation. I am not a fish and so I am not easily baited. I fully and freely condemn the gay agenda, just as I fully and freely condemn the abortionist agenda of pro-choice. However, it is not the one who screams the loudest or is the most insulting who speaks the truth and our Messiah was never once pulled into an argument, though many tried.

In all of His wonder and wisdom and strength, our Messiah is also the everlasting Father. This means He has always existed, and will always exist. He is also the everlasting Father, so it is by Him that we all came into existence. And even if there was life on other planets, He would be their Creator too and His sacrifice on the cross would also apply to each and every one of them, without being diminished.

I find it amusing that so many people believe in life on other planets, with so little proof. For life to exist on another planet as we know it on earth, or more specifically to exist in an organic form, scientists used to say that they would have to share several characteristics with earth. They have now increased the number to well over a hundred. No planets within range of our telescopes have even a few of the necessary characteristics and people will discover where the Easter Bunny lives before they find any signs of life on Mars.

I enjoy most science fiction because it is imaginative literature with little or no sex. I even enjoy movies about dinosaurs and cave men, but they are in the same category of fantasy as stories about elves and dragons. They do not exist in the real world and there is no concrete evidence that they ever existed.

We serve the Messiah who is the Everlasting Father, our Creator and Sustainer.

Finally, He is also described as the Prince of Peace. It should probably read the Prince who brings Peace, because He has always had an active hand in human affairs. He only lets things get to a certain level of evil, before He intervenes and sends humanity in a different direction. He is always active on behalf of humanity's righteous core and He always intervenes to limit the damage the wicked core is allowed to create.

There are many creation stories and any number of competing religious systems who offer widely different solutions for the problems of the world. We are not being haughty or conceited when we claim that our Messiah is the way, the truth and the life AND that no one comes to Father except through Him.

People can neither talk things into existence nor talk them out of existence. We can only study the nature of existence and come to faith in the One who brought existence into being. He is the Prince of Peace and He wants to create Peace in our hearts and lives and even in our communities. He wants to resolve conflicts and heal wounds, so that we can walk on the bumpy straight and narrow, even if we have to limp a little bit.

He wants to teach us how to make peace and how to live at peace, even with those who teach disgusting things and who lead horrible lifestyles. I never want to always try and find some common denominator with those who disagree with our faith and who do not accept our beliefs. I want to show them meekness and respect and earn the right to be heard. If they want to fight, I slip them off the hook and toss them back into the water.

This needs to be especially true at this season of the year and during the very trying times of Covid 19. I spend so much time on Facebook deleting argumentative accusations made about the Corona Virus by people who really do not know what they are talking about. Unfortunately, a while ago a Messianic rabbi who did not believe in the Corona virus, caught it and died. Liberty and freedom of conscience does not give anybody the right to place my health at risk, just because they feel the restrictions are a violation of their human rights.

They are not and even when the virus keeps on cloning and producing more variants, vaccination and booster shots are the best way to survive the crisis. The vast majority of people in ICU with Covid, are unvaccinated and so many vaccinated people with other health conditions are seeing their surgeries delayed or cancelled because these unwise people are clogging up the healthcare system.

I have also heard some pretty strange lies about the nature and origin of Christmas which have no basis in the Bible or in History. Santa Claus is not Satan and a Christmas tree is not a vile pagan symbol. We never taught our kids about Santa Claus and when I got sick with my allergies, we stopped putting up a Christmas tree. I was told about one Messianic Rabbi who went around to visit his flock at this time of the year, just to make sure that they had not put up a Christmas tree. Silly man. Do not let people with a Christmas chip on their shoulder wreck your celebration of the holiday with so much angry nonsense.

May you be blessed by the Child in the manger who is also: Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty G-d and Everlasting Father, as well as Prince of Peace. If you choose not to celebrate Christmas, that is your decision, but do not vilify the holiday with false accusations. It is the right date, because He came at the Right Time, to the Right Place and He was born into the Right family – and He accomplished everlasting salvation, just like He said He would.'