

Haggadah l'Holedet Mashiach

הגדה להולדת המשיח

Haggadah for the Birth of Messiah

Derek Leman

Introduction

The genesis of this Haggadah was a suggestion by Jon Cline that intermarried families might use a service, some readings, and activity ideas for December when the Christian side of the family celebrates Christmas.

Jon's suggestion took on new life as others in the Messianic Jewish community pointed to a need for some material for the study of Messiah's birth.

From the discussions that led to the Haggadah, we suggest several ways a family might use it:

1. Intermarried families who desire to do something about Christmas might find here either an alternative celebration or something to add to the family tradition and bring the Bible and Jewish tradition to bear on the celebration.
2. Messianic Jewish families might use it when the reading cycle comes to Shemot, the beginning of Exodus. The similarities between the birth story of Moses and that of Yeshua are a theme in the book of Matthew.
3. There are various reading cycles for the New Testament accompanying the Torah and Haftarah readings in the Messianic Jewish community. The Haggadah For the Birth of Messiah might be used at the time when the infancy narratives of Yeshua (Luke 1-2; Matthew 1-2) are being read.
4. There is a tradition which does not have sound historical support that Yeshua was born during Sukkot. Although the historical basis of this tradition is shaky, it has a wide following in some circles and makes symbolic sense (earthly tabernacles of divine glory are a good parallel to the birth of God's Son). The Haggadah For the Birth of Messiah might make a good addition to a family or synagogue celebration of Sukkot.

However you use this Haggadah, may your sense of the reality of Messiah be a blessing and may you pass to the next generation a strong identity as Jews following Messiah.

Family Activities

- Visit a sheep farm. Read Luke 2:1-20; Micah 4:6-8; Micah 5:1-3 (Jewish Bibles) or 5:2-4 (Christian Bibles). Note: Translations differ, but in Micah 4:6, the reference to the lame is most likely to lame sheep, comparing Israel at that time to sheep in need of a shepherd's care. And in Micah 4:8, Migdal Eder means "tower of the flock."
- Get a constellation chart. Prepare in advance, finding out what time of night and which direction to look for certain constellations. Locate Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, and Venus. Read Matthew 2:1-12. Some scholars think the Magi saw a comet. Others think it may have been a conjunction of Jupiter (Zeus, or the King), Saturn, and Mars in 7 B.C.E. Others have suggested an event involving Jupiter and the constellation Aries as well as other possible signs. The Magi would have believed in astrology and God has revealed himself through the beliefs of various nations. You could discuss how God shows himself to people in many ways, even bringing some Persian astrologers (Magi) to the birth of Messiah. He would bring hope not only to the Jewish people, but all nations.
- Get a Bible atlas and discover together some things about Bethlehem and Nazareth. Draw a map tracing the route of Joseph and Mary from Nazareth to Bethlehem to Egypt and back to Nazareth.
- Draw up a list of questions for Elijah about Messiah and store the list for future reference.

Prayers to Honor Messiah's Birth

Declare: Deliver us, O God, our deliverer, and gather us and save us from the nations, to acclaim Your holy name, to glory in Your praise.¹

Blessed is the Lord, God of Israel, from eternity to eternity.” And all the people said, “Amen” and “Praise the Lord.”²

וַיְמַלִּיךְ מַלְכוּתֶהָ בְּחַיֵּינוּ וּבְיוֹמֵינוּ וּבְכָל בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל. בְּעֵגְלָא
וּבְזִמְנַן קָרִיב וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן:

V'yamlikh malkhutei be-khayeikhon uv'yomeikhon uv'khayei d'kol beit Yisrael, bagalah uwizman kariv, v'imru amen.

May he establish his kingdom during your life and during your days, and during the life of all the house of Israel, even speedily and at a near time, and say ye amen.³

I will turn the lame into a remnant And the expelled into a populous nation. And the Lord will reign over them on Mount Zion Now and for evermore. And you, O Migdal-eder, Outpost of Fair Zion, It shall come to you: The former monarchy shall return — The kingship of Fair Jerusalem.⁴

And you, O Bethlehem of Ephrath, Least among the clans of Judah, From you one shall come forth To rule Israel for Me — One whose origin is from of old, From ancient times. Truly, He will leave them helpless Until she who is to bear has borne; Then the rest of his countrymen Shall return to the children of Israel. He shall stand and shepherd By the might of the Lord, By the power of the name Of the Lord his God, And they shall dwell secure. For lo, he shall wax great To the ends of the earth.⁵

וְזָכַר חֲסֵדֵי אֲבוֹתַי, וַיְבִיא גּוֹאֵל לְבָנַי בְּנֵיהֶם לְמַעַן שְׂמוֹ בְּאַהֲבָה:

V'zokbeir khasdei avot umeivee go'eil livnei v'neihem lema'an sbemo b'abavah.

You remember the deeds of the fathers and and in love will bring a Redeemer to their children's children for your name's sake.⁶

For the Israelites shall go a long time without king and without officials, without sacrifice and without cult pillars, and without ephod and teraphim. Afterward, the Israelites will turn back and will seek the Lord their God and David their king.⁷

See, a time is coming — declares the Lord — when I will raise up a true branch of David's line. He shall reign as king and shall prosper, and he shall do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah shall be delivered and Israel shall dwell secure.⁸

Then I will appoint a single shepherd over them to tend them — My servant David. He shall tend them, he shall be a shepherd to them. I the Lord will be their God, and My servant David shall be a ruler among them — I the Lord have spoken.⁹

The people that walked in darkness have seen a brilliant light; on those who dwelt in a land of gloom light has dawned.¹⁰

For my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples: a light, for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.¹¹

His mercy is on those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm, he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts, he has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his posterity for ever.¹²

When the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.¹³

For in him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.¹⁴

רַחֵם נָא יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל עַמְּךָ, וְעַל יְרוּשָׁלַיִם עִירְךָ, וְעַל צִיּוֹן
מִשְׁכַּן כְּבוֹדְךָ, וְעַל מַלְכוּת בֵּית דָּוִד מְשִׁיחֶךָ, וְעַל הַבַּיִת הַגָּדוֹל
וְהַקָּדוֹשׁ שְׁנִקְרָא שְׁמֶךָ עָלָיו.

Rakheim na, Adonai Eloheinu, al Yisra'el amekha, v'al Yerushalayim eerekha, v'al Tzion mishkan kevodekha, v'al malkut beit David mesheekbekha, v'al habayit hagadol v'hakadosh sheneekra shimkha alav.

Have mercy, O Lord our God, on Israel your people, and on Jerusalem your city, and on Zion the dwelling place of your glory, and on the kingdom of the house of David

your anointed one, and on the great and holy house that was called by your name.¹⁵

הַרְחַמֵּן, הוּא יִזְכֵּנוּ לְיָמֵי הַמָּשִׁיחַ וּלְחַיֵּי הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא.

Harakhaman, hu yezakeinu leemot hamashiakh ul'khayei ba'olam baba.

The Merciful One, may he make us worthy of the days of Messiah and the life of the World to Come.¹⁶

וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן:

V'imru Amen.

And let all say, Amen.

.....

1. 1 Chronicles 16:35, NJPS.
2. 1 Chronicles 16:36, NJPS.
3. From the Kaddish prayer.
4. Micah 4:7-8, NJPS. Migdal-eder means "tower of the flock." In the Targums it is said to be an area near Bethlehem and the place from which King Messiah would come.
5. Micah 5:1-3, NJPS (2-4 in Christian Bibles).
6. From the Amidah, first benediction.
7. Hosea 3:4-5, NJPS.
8. Jeremiah 23:5-6, NJPS.
9. Ezekiel 34:23-24, NJPS.
10. Isaiah 9:1, NJPS.
11. Luke 2:30-32, NET.
12. Luke 1:50-55, RSV.
13. Galatians 4:4-5, RSV.
14. Colossians 1:19-20, RSV.
15. From the Birkat Hamazon (Grace After Meals).
16. From the Birkat Hamazon (Grace After Meals).

Mysterious Foreshadowings

Some of the most amazing scriptures about Messiah's birth were written by Micah, a prophet who lived in the days of Isaiah (the eighth century B.C.E). Micah's era was still very early in Israel's story. The exile to Babylon had not yet happened. The throne of David had not yet been lost. Judah was not yet broken and humbled. There was danger, however, and the people feared the Assyrians and Arameans.

Into this fearful generation the prophet Micah delivered some oracles of hope. The promises were obscure, mysterious, about some future deliverer. When the deliverer would come and who he would be, it was all a mystery.

And you, O Migdal-eder, Outpost of Fair Zion, It shall come to you: The former monarchy shall return — The kingship of Fair Jerusalem. -- Micah 4:8

Here is a hint about the place from which the deliverance would come, and the place is Bethlehem and near a tower used by shepherds to keep watch. Migdal-eder means Tower of the Flock. The place name turns up twice in the Bible. The first time is in Genesis 35:21, right after Jacob has buried Rachel on the way to Bethlehem. This is the basis for the idea in later Jewish literature that Migdal-eder is near Bethlehem. An Aramaic paraphrase (Targum Pseudo-Jonathan) says, "The tower of the flock, the place from which King Messiah will be revealed at the end of days."

A little later in the book, Micah says:

And you, O Bethlehem of Ephrath, least among the clans of Judah, from you one shall come forth to rule Israel for Me — One whose origin is from of old, from ancient times. . . He shall stand and shepherd by the might of the Lord, by the power of the name of the Lord his God, and they shall dwell secure. For lo, he shall wax great to the ends of the earth. -- Micah 5:1, 3 (2, 4 in Christian Bibles)

This is a promise of a king, a king from the old line, the line of David. In Micah's time, there still were kings from David's line. Yet long after Micah was gone, the throne of David became empty. His promise began to be noticed. There was a longing for the former kingship, for a king like David to come again.

The early followers of Yeshua had no problem identifying him with this king to be born in Bethlehem. The identification of Yeshua with Micah's promised king requires faith, since Yeshua has not yet restored the throne of David or ruled Israel. Yet in some ways he has waxed great to the ends of the earth and has brought all nations to the God of Israel. His birth in Bethlehem is not enough by itself to proclaim him Israel's long-awaited king, but that he fits the pattern is a sign to be noted and cherished as we wait for his kingdom.

Peace, Consolation, and Redemption

"Comfort, comfort, my people," Isaiah begins the last half of his book (40:1). And the latter half of Isaiah is especially about Messiah, Israel's restoration, and the Age to Come.

The people of Israel had been exiled, humiliated, and cut down to size in Babylon. But in the prophets there is a stream of consolation. Isaiah 40, echoed later in Ezekiel 34 and 37, speak of God as the shepherd, seeking out his lost flock, holding them in his arms, and speaking tenderly. Alongside the image of God as the shepherd, there is a more specific notice: that God will send a shepherd, a king like David: "I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them" (Ezek 34:23).

Centuries later, we have a story of a holy man at the Temple, Simeon, holding the infant Yeshua. It was said of Simeon that he was waiting for the consolation of Israel and that he had been promised to see the Lord's Messiah before he died (Luke 2:25-35). These two ideas are connected in Simeon's understanding and they should be in ours as well. The appearance of Messiah means comfort for the people of Messiah, the people of Israel.

Similarly, the prophetess Anna beheld the baby at the Temple as well and told the news to a community who were often at the Temple (Luke 2:36-38). This community is described as those who believed in and waited for news of the redemption of Jerusalem. Anna understood the appearance of Yeshua to have something to do with Jerusalem's restoration in the last days, when according to Israel's prophets, the city will become God's dwelling and the center of a worldwide kingdom of peace and abundance.

The idea that the advent of Yeshua the Messiah had something to do with the peace, consolation, and redemption of Israel had already been affirmed by the angel of the Lord when he appeared to the shepherds of Bethlehem (Luke 2:8-14). The angel said, "I bring you good news that brings great joy to all the people," with the people meaning the people of Israel.

The coming of David as the One Shepherd of Israel, the days when Jerusalem will be God's house again, the time when the mountains will drip wine and Judah will dwell securely, are tied to the birth of Yeshua. Simeon and Anna were worshipping at the Temple daily and waiting. A community of people remained close to God and waited. We still wait, though we too, like Simeon, can wait in greater peace. We may not yet see accomplished the consolation of Israel, but we have seen the one who will do it. And as they grew in confidence seeing him as an infant, so we grow confident seeing his words, his life, his miracles, his laying down his life, and his resurrection and ascension to glory. The birth of Messiah must be understood as good news for the Jewish people, even while we are waiting.

Savior, Messiah, Lord

In Luke's telling of the birth story of Yeshua, some shepherds in Bethlehem saw an angel who told them a special child was born not far from where they were watching sheep. They would find a baby wrapped in "swaddling clothes," as the old English translation says, or torn strips of cloth.

As the angel described this child and what he would mean to the shepherds of Bethlehem, he used three titles: "For to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Messiah the Lord" (Luke 2:11).

Some of these words have nuances and connotations for us that would not have occurred so much to the shepherds of Bethlehem. What would this triple title -- Savior, Messiah, and Lord -- have meant to them?

Savior today carries connotations of the death of Yeshua on a cross to save his people from sin. The shepherds would not have thought of the word in that way. A savior or deliverer was someone who rescued people in peril. The judges of Israel, people like Gideon and Samson, were called saviors (Judges 3:9).

Luke wrote in Greek, so the second title he used was literally Christ (Greek, *christos*). The idea behind the word Christ and Messiah is the same. It means someone who has been anointed as king or priest or prophet. Anointing was an ancient ceremony pouring perfumed oil over the head of one being raised to a position of honor. The shepherds though would have thought of more than just someone who was worthy of anointing. The title meant to them the long awaited king who would be like David and bring peace for his people Israel.

The third title, Lord, is one we can easily misinterpret. As Messianic Jews we believe, as do Christians, that Yeshua was God become man. Yet the shepherds of Bethlehem knew nothing of the idea that Yeshua was divine. For them the word Lord suggested a ruler, a king.

There are so many things we can realize as world-changingly important about Yeshua. We can easily pass over some of the simpler meanings of his person and work. The shepherds, among the first to hear of this special child, heard an astounding announcement. The child was announced by angels as a deliverer like the judges of old, the long awaited Messiah from David's line, and a Lord who would rule over the people.

These titles have not lost their meaning. We need a deliverer still, from the physical problems of this world as well as the spiritual ones. We are waiting still for Messiah, as Yeshua has not yet completed his work and established his reign of peace. We acknowledge him in advance as Lord, one to whom we will bend the knee and confess allegiance at his appearing.

Who needed more faith, the shepherds who were told all this belonged to a baby, or us, having waited thousands of years for the full reality to arrive?

A Telling Avoidance

There is an interesting place in the writings of Josephus, the Jewish revolutionary who was captured by the Romans and who wrote several important works of history. Josephus, whether out of convenience or conviction, came to believe that Rome was ordained by God to save Israel. He is pro-Roman and pro-Jewish at the same time. He wrote histories largely to help the Romans understand and appreciate the value of the Jewish people and their history.

Israel rose up in rebellion against Rome in 66 C.E. in a war which culminated in the Temple being destroyed and most of the city of Jerusalem with it in 70.

One of the undercurrents of this first Jewish War with Rome was the high expectation that these were the days when Messiah would come. What were some of the signs and reasons that people were so easily convinced they were living in Messianic times? Josephus, by purposefully trying to avoid it, gives us one important answer though he does it very indirectly.

In his *Antiquities of the Jews* 10:205-210, Josephus is describing the story of Daniel 2 and the vision described in Daniel 2:31-35. Daniel interpreted the dream of Nebuchednezzar, the Babylonian king, in which he saw a great statue with a head of gold, shoulders and arms of silver, belly and thighs of brass, and legs and feet of iron.

Josephus rightly identifies the head of gold as Babylon and notes that the lower sections are succeeding empires. Yet Josephus stops short of identifying the silver, brass, and iron kingdoms and especially avoids identifying the stone which comes down from heaven and smashes the statue.

Why this telling avoidance? Josephus says, "Daniel did also declare the meaning of the stone to the king but I do not think it proper to relate it."

N.T. Wright, citing a study by Josephus scholar Ralph Marcus, notes that Josephus would not want to put into writing what the prophecy meant (*The New Testament and the People of God*, 304). His patrons were Roman. Not only did he need their support and goodwill, but he also wanted them to have a favorable attitude toward Israel. If Josephus had written the meaning of the stone, he would have let them know that the Jewish Bible says the ultimate kingdom will be in Israel and will break all other kingdoms!

Josephus would not want them to know that the silver kingdom was Persia, the brass kingdom Greece, and the iron kingdom Rome. He would not want them to know that the stone from heaven was Messiah and the place of the last and greatest kingdom was Israel, not Italy!

But Josephus' telling avoidance also suggests a background to the revolt against Rome. Why

were Josephus' contemporaries persuaded they lived in Messianic times? The answer is simple. They lived in the days of Daniel's fourth kingdom, the one in which Messiah would come.

We can say then, and not only from this one piece of evidence, that the days into which Yeshua was born were days of expectation of Messiah. We read in Luke 2 of Simeon and Anna, two devout Jews at the Temple who understood the times and knew Messiah was coming. The rest of the people had Messianic faith as well, even if that faith took different forms. We can agree with Paul: "When the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law" (Gal. 4:4-5).

A Truth Hard to Handle

The idea of Messiah from the Hebrew Bible and Second Temple era tradition held together a number of tensions. There is the tension between Messiah as prophet, priest, or king, for example. And there is the tension between the earthly king Messiah, perhaps a man like David who would live and die as a normal man, and the heavenly king like the Son of Man from Daniel, who would be eternal.

The uniqueness of God, the impassable gulf between humanity and deity, seemed to be a firm Jewish notion. While the Greeks and Romans could believe in demi-gods, the Jews would not bow to an image of a man like Caesar. Roman law made it possible for Jews even in the diaspora to get around such requirements.

Yet there already were a number of notions in Judaism by the time of Yeshua which made the idea of a divine man possible. The notion of man being made in the image and likeness of God is one doctrine which brings humanity and deity closer together. Then there was the idea of wisdom as a divine agent in the created world, almost an incarnation, which was called in some Jewish literature by an Aramaic name: the memra (see Proverbs 8 for the origins of this idea). And the heavenly nature of the Son of Man in Daniel 7 suggested the potential for a man who transcended normal human limitations.

Perhaps though it was the difficulty of the idea of divinity taking on humanity that led Yeshua to be elusive about the subject. It was through actions, like speaking to storms, and ambiguous sayings, like "I and the Father are one," that Yeshua pointed to a truth hard to handle.

The birth of Messiah is more than the birth of a king. It is an event in salvation history on the same level as the atoning death and the victorious resurrection of the Messiah. In his incarnation, his taking on humanity while retaining deity, Messiah elevated humanity. The possibility of people being conformed to the image of God increased on the day God became a man, born as an infant, brought into the world in the usual way. The first Adam was redeemed by the last. The angelic beings looked on in wonder, as immortality became mortal, as infinity became finite, as omnipotence emptied into servanthood.

The divinity as well as humanity of Yeshua is a truth hard to handle even today. Both Christians and Jews stumble over the idea. Few can accept it. The Father and Son are one in a unity of being. And the birth of Messiah is about the Father sending the Son, identical in substance, and yet separate persons. The Son, as Paul says, did not consider equality with God as something to be grasped, but gave up omnipotence to serve his people Israel and all those from the nations who would call on him.

Alfred Edersheim on Messiah's Birth

Alfred Edersheim (1825-1889) authored such books as *The Life and Times of the Jesus the Messiah* and *Sketches of Jewish Social Life*. He was a rising young Jewish intellectual who became a follower of Jesus in 1843. His writings are at once sharply critical of Judaism in some unfortunate ways that echo common Christian anti-Judaism, and yet in other ways he was a champion for his people. He maintained a Jewish identity in many ways rather than simply abandoning it in favor of a Christian identity. He knew the rabbinic literature well and brought them to bear on his writings in ways that have delighted readers ever since, so that his books are still popular today.

See David Mishkin, *The Wisdom of Alfred Edersheim* (2008, Wipf & Stock), for more.

On Yeshua's Nativity

If we think of Jesus as the Messiah from heaven, the surroundings of outward poverty, so far from detracting, seem most congruous to his divine character. Earthly splendor would have seemed like tawdry tinsel, and the utmost simplicity like that clothing of lilies, which far surpassed all the glories of Solomon's court.

--Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, pg. 129.

On Jewish Messianic Hope

In truth it scarcely seems exaggeration to say that throughout the history of Israel we can trace the times of bitterest sorrows by their brightest messianic expectations, as if that golden harvest waved richest where the ploughshares had drawn the furrows deepest, and the precious seed had been watered by blood and tears.

--Prophecy and History in Relation to the Messiah, pg. 9.

On the Peace Yeshua Brings

No man ever found peace by seeking it primarily; every man may find it by seeking Christ.

--The Golden Diary of Heart-Converse with Jesus in the Psalms, pg. 208.