

The 7 Miracle Births of the Jewish Scriptures

A Message given by Rabbi Todd Lesser, Adon Olam Messianic Congregation, Greenville, SC

Given on *Rosh Hashanah* (Jewish New Year) / Feast of Trumpets (*Yom Teruah*)

Rosh Hashanah is how the Jewish people refer to the Feast of Trumpets. They pretty much treat this feast as the Jewish New Year, which is what *Rosh Hashanah* means. But in the traditional observance, there are also references to our eternal destiny. The blowing of the *shofar* is also emphasized as we are instructed to do this in Leviticus 23:24. Messianics tend to call this day either the Feast of Trumpets or Yom Teruah, the day of the Trumpet blast, as it is called in Numbers 29:1.

The traditional readings for *Rosh Hashanah* include the accounts of the births of Isaac and Samuel. According to the Rabbis, we read these texts on this day because Isaac was born on *Rosh Hashanah* and Samuel was conceived on Rosh Hashanah, though I know of no Biblical support for these conclusions. But the Scriptures do describe the miraculous nature of their conceptions.

Regarding the conception of Isaac, his Mother Sarah is described in Genesis 18:11 as “old and well stricken in age; and it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women.” *Sarai* had, in fact, been barren since before Abram had been called by the Lord to leave his ancestral homeland and go to a land that the Lord would show him, and the prospects for a child are looking even worse because of her advanced age. Nonetheless, the Lord tells Abram in Genesis 13:16 that He will make his seed, his descendants, as numerous as the dust of the earth.

Some time afterward, in Genesis 15:1, the Lord appears to Abram in a vision and Abram takes advantage of this to remind the Lord that Sarah is barren, and he assumes his heir will have to come from someone who has been born in his house, not a son by Sarah. The Lord tells Abram that he will have a child from his own loins in Genesis 15:4, and that his offspring will be as numerous as the stars in the sky. So far, so good, until *Sarai* and Abram misunderstand what the Lord means, and decide to help God fulfill his promise by having Abram produce a son by *Sarai's* handmaid, *Hagar*.

Hagar becomes pregnant and is soon sent away by *Sarai*. Hagar encounters the *ma'lach Adonai*, the Angel or Messenger of the Lord. The *mal'ach Adonai* tells Hagar to name her son *Yishmael*, literally God has heard, because the Lord has heard of her affliction. The Messenger tells Hagar in Genesis 16:12 that *Yishmael* will be a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren.

We are seeing this prophecy fulfilled in our day, as it is Ishmael's descendants, the Arab world, who as Israeli statesman Abba Eben once said famously describing their peacemaking efforts with Israel, they never miss an opportunity to miss an opportunity.

Some of us, myself included, struggle with just taking a stand for what we believe, for doing what we already know our God would have us to do. And make no mistake, any division within our ranks is a sign of weakness to our enemy. We need to be using our weapon of Spiritual warfare, the sword given by the Spirit, the Word of the Lord (Ephesians 6:17); our weapon of unity, getting along with our fellow believers and one another; our weapon of love, not our own love, which is selfish, but God's love flowing through us, which will change the world. The love like Richard Wurmbrand, a Jewish believer, had for his torturers, figuring they needed to hear about the love of God, even between the beatings they were giving him. The ministry he started is called Voice of the Martyrs and continues to bring the love of God to the places in this world where hate is most rampant.

Getting back to Abraham and Sarah, their theology gets a bit of an adjustment. Wrong theologies can really create some major problems in our lives. Our Jewish people were expecting a deliverer in the first century, one who would be a conquering king and deliver them from their Roman oppressors. The Lord had something else in mind, and that generation, was condemned. Ultimately, their temple was destroyed and they and they were driven out of the land.

Many in the church today have a theology that needs adjustment and that is replacement theology. Shaul warned against the view that the blessings and promises go to someone else and the curses are left for the Jewish people of today. Let's take a look at Romans 11:17 and I will explain as we go along.

It says, But if some of the branches were broken off, [referring to unbelieving Jewish people], and you – a wild olive, [referring to those who are not Jewish, but have come to believe in the Jewish Messiah], were grafted in among them and have become equal sharers in the rich root of the olive tree [who is Messiah Yeshua], then don't boast as if you were better than the branches. He goes on to point out that their boasting puts them in danger of being cut off, because ultimately, the natural branches [the Jewish people] will be much easier to graft back into their own tree. We are just seeing the beginning of that in the Messianic movement of today. Our people are embracing the Jewish Messiah and contuing to embrace their Jewish identity.

When Sarai is 90, God establishes his covenant with Abram and changes his and *Sarai's* names to Abraham and Sarah. He informs Abraham that Sarah will bear him a son and God says that this son will be the one through whom the covenant will be continued. They are instructed to name the son Isaac, actually Yitzchak, which means laughter. We read in Genesis 17:19

And God said: "Nay but Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son; and thou shalt call his name Isaac; and I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant for his seed after him."

One of the traditional Torah readings for Rosh Hashanah, which we red earlier is called the *Akedah*, which means binding, referring to the binding of Isaac found in Genesis 22. After entering into a covenant with Abraham, we find the Lord instructing Abraham to take his son Isaac and to offer him as a burnt offering in the land of Moriah. Genesis 22:2 says, Take now they son, thine only son, whom thou lovest, even Isaac, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt-offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.

I think we would understand if Abraham had decided to question the Lord here as he had earlier. He could easily have said, Lord, I am trying to figure out how I offer up Isaac as a burnt offering and yet you promised that the covenant promises were to go to him and his seed. Things aren't looking real good concerning Isaac having any offspring at this point. But apparently, Abraham does not question the Lord in this situation.

One reason is that God and Abraham have entered into a special relationship defined by a covenant. We often mention how the book of Deuteronomy is written in the format of an Ancient Near East Treaty known as a Suzerainty Treaty.

But this wasn't the only type of pact executed between parties in ancient times. The Covenant between God and Abraham is modeled after a different type of contract, it follows the pattern of what is called a covenant of strong friendship.

In this type of covenant, everything that one party owns is available to the other party up to and including either party's most valuable possession. The covenant is being tested here as v1 says that God did prove Abraham, which is old English for tested him. The Lord is testing Abraham's commitment to the covenant. He is testing Abraham's ability to trust in His promises, despite his own reasoning and his love for his son. God has promised Abraham that his descendants will be as numerous as the dust of the earth, the sand on the seashore and the stars in the sky. Yet by logic, the last thing that will help bring this about is to offer up as a sacrifice your only heir to these promises.

But God is testing Abraham, to see if he is going to keep the covenant and the test is to offer up his most prized possession, the child of promise, the child of his wife, Sarah. The Lord has told Abraham that it will be a son of his by Sarah who will be the heir to the covenant promise. So if Isaac is sacrificed, Sarah will have to miraculously overcome nature a second time.

Finally, and probably the toughest, is sacrificing the child you not only love, but have longed for for so many years. And it is not like God springs this on Abraham at the last minute. According to Genesis 22:4, they arrived in the land of Moriah on the 3rd day, meaning Abraham has 3 days to contemplate what he has been asked to do. We probably wouldn't blame him for thinking to himself at some point, "Does God really want me to offer up Isaac?" Maybe I didn't understand him correctly. Does He really know what He is doing? Yet in obedience, Abraham is ready to offer up his son in compliance with the Lord's request.

We have learned previously that whenever we find the phrase third day or three days in the Scriptures, it is picture, a type or shadow of the concept of resurrection. This appears to apply here as we read in the New Covenant Scriptures of Abraham's faith demonstrated in this event. Hebrews 11:17-19 says,

“By trusting, Avraham, when he was put to the test, offered up Yitz'chak as a sacrifice. Yes, he offered up his only son, he who had received the promises, to whom it had been said, "What is called your 'seed' will be in Yitz'chak." For he had concluded that God could even raise people from the dead! And, figuratively speaking, he did so receive him.”

As they proceed to the mountain of sacrifice, Isaac asks his father in v 7, “Behold the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” Abraham responds in v8 of Genesis Chap 22, and I am quoting from the Jewish Publication Society version of the Scriptures, “God will provide himself the lamb for the burnt offering.”

As I mentioned earlier, in this type of covenant, one party could ask the other for their most prized possession, but the second party could in return ask the first party for their most prized possession as well, so you had to be careful if you were going to test the covenant commitment in this way.

In other words, when God asked Abraham to offer up his son as a sacrifice on the altar, God knew that he had to be willing to do the same thing. So our understanding of the covenant between God and Abraham enables us to see that 2000 years before Yeshua was born, the Lord had already made a commitment to offer up his son to fulfill the requirements of the Abrahamic covenant.

Unlike Isaac, who was bound, tied up, at some point, forced to be a sacrifice, perhaps against his will, Yeshua seeks to avoid his outcome, but submits to his Father's will. In Matthew 26:39, Yeshua says, “My Father, if possible, let this cup pass from me! Yet – not what I want, but what you want.” According to Matthew 26:42, Yeshua goes off to pray a second time, and prays, “My Father, if this cup cannot pass away unless I drink it, let what you want be done.”

According to verse 44, this occurs a third time. Remember what we just said about things with 3 in them being symbolic of resurrection, Yeshua prays essentially the same prayer 3 times. Saying something 3 times also establishes a vow, which we will see at Yom Kippur when we talk about the Kol Nidre chant.

But as we said, Yeshua laid his life down willingly. In John 10:17-18, he says, “This is why the Father loves me: because I lay down my life – in order to take it up again! No one takes it away from me; on the contrary, I lay it down of my own free will. I have the power to lay it down, and I have the power to take it up again. This is what my Father commanded me to do.”

The reason that the *Akeda* passage is associated with the Feast of Trumpets is because as Abraham drew the knife to slay Isaac, what happens? The Messenger of the Lord, yells out in v 11 Abraham, Abraham, and tells him “Lay not thy hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him for now I know thou art a God-fearing man, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from Me. And v 13 tells us that Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his [Hold up *shofar*] horns. And Abraham offers up the ram as a substitute, the ram dies instead of Isaac.

Yet 2000 years later, when Yeshua is to be offered up, a substitute is made available, but this time the substitute is rejected and the Son of God is sacrificed. The Substitute is named Son of the Father, Bar Abba, Barabbas, but the people choose to free the guilty one, Barabbas, and execute the sinless one. Yeshua was executed for the crime of being the King of the Jews, as it said in the charge over his head. He also was given a crown, a crown of thorns. In the acknowledgment of God’s sovereignty, his kingship, as one of the themes of this holiday as we mentioned last night, we also should acknowledge, the one who will return as King of Kings, King above all earthly kings, who will reign from His throne in Jerusalem. And what New Testament passage tells us this? It’s not the New Testament, it’s found in the Hebrew Scriptures.

In the first 4 verses of Zech 14, we read, “Behold a day of the Lord cometh when thy spoil shall be divided in the midst of thee. 2 For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished; and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, but the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city. 3 Then shall the Lord go forth, and fight against those nations, as when He fighteth in the day of battle. 4 And His feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleft in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, so that there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south.

The people are instructed to flee as the Lord wages battle and all the holy ones with him. After the battle, it says in verse 9 as we quoted earlier in the Alenu, “And the Lord shall be King over all the earth; in that day shall the Lord be One and His name one. According to verse 16, everyone that is left of all the nations that came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the king, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the feast of Sukkot, Tabernacles. So the final moed, the final set time of Leviticus 23, is not only for the Jewish people, but after Messiah’s return, the nations will come to Jerusalem to worship him at the Feast of Tabernacles.

Now, I want to talk about the *Haftarah* portion for a moment. In this portion from 1 Samuel, we see another birth to a woman who has thus far been barren. A Levite named *Elkannah* has a wife named *Khanah*, or Hannah, who desires with all her heart to provide her husband with a son. Similar to the account of Sarah and Hagar, *Elkannah* already has a son through a second wife and Hannah feels like she has failed in her duty to her husband. In 1 Samuel 1:17, the *kohen*, the priest Eli tells Hannah that the Lord will give her the son that she so strongly desires.

As we see here with Hannah, we should take note that when the Lord plans to raise up a special child, it is frequently the case that barrenness precedes this event. This is seen with Abraham’s wife, Sarah; Isaac’s wife, Rebecca (Genesis 25:1); Jacob’s wife, Rachel (Genesis 29:31), and Samson’s Mother (Judges 13:2). What happens when the Lord hears the cry of Hannah? She has a son, whom she names Sh’muel, Samuel, because as she says in v 20, “I have asked him of the Lord.” And just as she promised in 1 Samuel 1:11, Hannah gives him over to Eli to serve the Lord.

In our New Covenant reading from Matthew 1, we see another miraculous birth of a Jewish male child. *Miryam*, Mary is with child by the Ruach HaKodesh, the Holy Spirit. She will bring forth a son, who is to be named Yeshua, which means Adonai saves, because he will save his people from their sins.

And we also find in this passage that the birth of Yeshua is described as a fulfillment of Prophecy in Matthew 1:23. Yeshua’s birth is described as fulfilling Isaiah 7:14. which Matthew quotes saying, “The virgin will conceive and bear a son, and they will call him *Im-manu-el*.”

Many Jewish people do not accept the possibility that Yeshua could be the Messiah because they think that miraculous births are tied to Christianity. However, there are a number of miraculous births mentioned in the Hebrew scriptures – 6 to be exact.

Isaac, son of Sarah, because she was barren & past child-bearing age, Jacob & Esau, sons of Rebecca because she was barren, Samson whose Mother was barren, Samuel -- the Scriptures say that the Lord had shut up his Mother's womb, and the Shunamite woman, who didn't believe it when Elisha told her she would have a son as she was barren and her husband was old.

There is actually a 7th miraculous birth mentioned in the Hebrew Scriptures, but it was not fulfilled until 400 years after the last Hebrew prophet spoke. And we would expect the 7th miraculous birth to be the greatest of all. We know the number 7 is a number of completion, fulfillment, climax. Here the 7th birth is a fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14, which also links with Isaiah 9:6. In Isaiah 7:14, a sign is to be given to the Jewish people, the sign is that a young woman or virgin will conceive and bear a son, who will be called Immanuel (God is with us). In Isaiah 9 verse 5 or 6, depending on translation, it says that a child would be born, and his name would be called Pele Yoetz (Wonderful in Counsel), El Gibor (God the Mighty), Avi Ad (the Everlasting Father), and Sar Shalom (the Ruler of Peace).

I often point out that according to Daniel 12:2, there are two possible eternal states that we can experience. Daniel says that after our deaths, we will come back to life, and at that point we will experience either everlasting life, or reproach and everlasting abhorrence. In the Jewish Scriptures, 2 books are mentioned that reflect our eternal destiny. The first book is mentioned in Psalm 69:28, it is called the *safer chayim*, the book of the living, and actually in this verse, King David is asking the Lord to blot those who are not righteous out of the Book of the Living.

But being righteous presents some challenges to us. We are unable to achieve righteousness because we are unable to keep the Torah perfectly, we fall short of the standard of righteousness of a holy and righteous God. So God sent His son to keep the Torah perfectly, to enable us to be seen as righteous by his being offered up as an acceptable sacrifice for our sins.

In terms of our righteousness, or rather our lack thereof, we have to meet the requirement of Leviticus 17:11 for there to be atonement, for sins to be forgiven. Leviticus 17:11 says, 11 For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that maketh atonement by reason of the life. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, God made this sinless man to be a sin offering on our behalf, so that in union with him, we might fully share in God's righteousness.

Because our righteousness is based on the work of God's son, not our own good deeds, we don't have to worry that our good deeds might not be sufficient to overcome our bad deeds. Our names are written in the book of the living because of the work of Messiah and we are able to spend eternity in God's presence because we are seen as righteous through the sacrifice of Messiah Yeshua. As we said last night, we don't hope that we will have our names written in the Book of the Living, we know by our Faith in the Lord and our Faith in the truth contained in His word, that we have our names inscribed in this Book.

The other book of destiny mentioned in the Hebrew Scriptures is called the Book of Remembrance, discussed in Malachi 3:16-18. Remember, one of the traditional themes of Rosh Hashanah is *zichronot*, Remembrance. Here's what we read concerning this book.

“Then they that feared the LORD Spoke one with another; And the LORD hearkened, and heard, And a book of remembrance was written before Him, For them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon His name. And they shall be Mine, saith the LORD of hosts, In the day that I do make, even Mine own treasure; And I will spare them, as a man spareth His own son that serveth him. Then shall ye again discern between the righteous and the wicked, Between him that serveth God And him that serveth Him not.

Notice there is no middle class, you are either in the book because you are righteous or you are not in the book, because you are not righteous. How good do you have to be to be righteous? The Scriptures reveal that there is none that is righteous, no not one. We are not able to achieve righteousness by our own efforts. Those who lived before Messiah came to this Earth in the form of a man were seen as righteous because they participated in a sacrificial system that pointed to his fulfillment of God's requirements for righteousness.

Those like us who have come after Messiah's sacrifice, look back to the work that he accomplished at his first coming, being the sacrifice for our sins, as we look forward to his second coming when he will be established as the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, the King over all the earth.

But our natural inclination as selfish human beings is to rebel against authority, particularly the authority of our Creator. The only way we can achieve righteousness is by having our sins forgiven through a blood sacrifice, and the only way to accomplish that today is to accept Messiah Yeshua's sacrifice on our behalf.

When we accept Yeshua's sacrifice, we enter into a covenant with God, based on the final covenant renewal found in Jeremiah 31:31-34. Here we find that the New Covenant is made with the Jewish people like all of the earlier covenants, only this one will be written on their hearts. As Shaul says in Romans 9:4, referring to his brethren in the flesh, the Jewish people: ...my grief is so great, the pain in my heart so constant, that I could wish myself actually under God's curse and separated from the Messiah, if it would help my brothers, my own flesh and blood, the people of Israel! They were made God's children, his presence has been with them, the covenants are theirs, likewise the giving of the Torah, the Temple service, and the promises; the Patriarchs are theirs, and from them, as far as his physical descent is concerned, came the Messiah, who is over all. Praised be Adonai for ever!

In Jeremiah 31:34, we read concerning this New Covenant, for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin will I remember no more. We look forward to seeing this more as we see more and more of our people accepting their Messiah.

Lord, we thank you that we have experienced the miracle of physical birth and the miracle of spiritual birth, having new life in Messiah Yeshua. We thank you for the birth of your son, who came to Earth and willingly laid down his life so that we might have forgiveness for our sins. Because of what he has done, we thank you that our names are written in the Book of Life and the Book of Remembrance. And we realize that our names are not written in these books because of what we have done for the Lord, they are written in them because of our willingness to trust in what he has done for us.

Lord we ask you to work change in the lives of those who are here and in us as a congregation, as a community. And we look forward to all of the good things that you are going to do, even as we get ready to close out this feast and prepare our hearts for the Day of Atonement and the feast of Tabernacling with you. And we ask these things in the name of your precious son, Yeshua our Messiah, amen.