

ISSUE #19
2013

YESHUA

A PROPHET LIKE MOSES

BY
JOHN ATKINSON



AN OLIVE PRESS
RESEARCH PAPER

Welcome to the Olive Press Research Paper – an occasional paper featuring articles that cover a wide spectrum of issues which relate to the ministry of CMJ.

Articles are contributed by CMJ staff (past and present), also by Trustees, Representatives, CMJ Supporters or by interested parties.

Articles do not necessarily portray CMJ's standpoint on a particular issue but may be published on the premise that they allow a pertinent understanding to be added to any particular debate.

YESHUA - A PROPHET LIKE MOSES

As this comparison suggests, a greater appreciation of the character and role of Moses will lead to a greater appreciation of Yeshua as the promised Messiah. In this paper I will examine some of the similarities and differences between these pivotal characters in the Bible, taking into account some of the rabbinic material associated with Moses.

AN IMPORTANT CAVEAT

The view of Moses in rabbinic Judaism, and therefore modern Orthodox Judaism, is based both on the Bible and the extra-biblical writings of the Talmud, and more especially Maimonides' writings, which date from the late 12th century AD.

The addition of the Talmudic and Maimonidic materials contribute to the elevation of Moses far beyond the limits that the biblical text places upon this servant of God.

So central did the figure of Moses become that the 7th of Maimonides' Thirteen Principles of Faith states that Moses' prophecies are true, and that he was the greatest of the prophets:

I believe with perfect faith that the prophecy of Moses is absolutely true. He was the chief of all prophets, both before and after Him.¹

This elevation of Moses by his namesake, Moses Maimonides, is reflected on the latter's gravestone, where the following inscription appears:

"From Moses to Moses, none arose as Moses."²

To some extent the elevation of Moses was due to the pressure of the prophetic claims of Christianity concerning Yeshua, and later those of Islam concerning Mohammed.

1 Brown, M. L. 2012 The Real Kosher Jesus. Florida. FrontLine. p 165-170

2 http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/75991/jewish/Maimonides-His-Life-and-Works.htm

By asserting that Moses was the chief of all prophets, both before and after him, Maimonides set Judaism apart from Christianity and Islam. He succeeded in making a claim for the superiority of Moses above that of Yeshua and Mohammed without mentioning their names or fully explaining what he considered prophecy to be. This intellectual sleight of hand is understandable, given the threat posed to Jews of the time who were foolish enough to make statements against Christianity or Islam.

There are compelling reasons for the elevation of Moses as a reaction to the external threat to Judaism, as well as the need to strengthen the sense of identity within the Jewish community. Despite these considerations, we are forced to conclude that Maimonides contributed to a significant movement beyond the testimony of the Torah, and to a depiction of Moses that is reminiscent of the heroes of Greek legend such as Achilles or Hercules.

As an astute commentator has said:

“Hero-worship is mostly idol gossip”

A simple example of this kind of inflated interpretation is given by the Midrash on Moses’ birth. Regarding Moses’ birth, we read that:

“his mother saw that he was good.”

What did she see? One interpretation, cited in several classic sources, is that she saw that he was [born] circumcised³ and knew that there was greatness in store for him.⁴

This Moses joins various rabbinic lists of those who were born circumcised. Some commentators have tried to soften this claim by suggesting that this form of circumcision was a description of character rather than a physical attribute. However, as the original text states:

“Moses’ mother saw that he was good”

3 Babylonian Talmud: Tractate Sotah 12a : 29

4 Shemot (Exodus) Rabbah 1:24

The literal reading supports a physical attribute which was visible rather than the connection between good and circumcised made by these sages.

There are many other examples of rabbinic claims for Moses that go well beyond the text:

- Both the conception and childbirth of Moses were painless, for Yokheved was excluded from the decree placed on Eve, according to a gloss, by virtue of her righteousness.⁵
- Moses' influence and activity extend back to the Creation. Heaven and earth, it is said, were created only for his sake⁶.
- The creation account of the water on the second day (Genesis 1:6-8) does not close with the usual formula "And God saw that it was good" because God foresaw that Moses would suffer through water.⁷
- Noah did not merit being saved from the Flood; he was saved because Moses was destined to descend from him.⁸
- The angels Jacob saw in his dream, ascending to and descending from heaven (Genesis 28:10-19), were really Moses and Aaron⁹.
- The birth of Moses as the liberator of the people of Israel was foretold to Pharaoh by his soothsayers, which resulted in his cruel command to cast all the male children into the river.¹⁰
- Miriam is said to have foretold to her father Amram that a son would be born to him who would liberate Israel from the yoke of Egypt.¹¹
- Not only was Moses born circumcised, but he was able to walk immediately after birth.¹²
- This is contradicted by another story that he was circumcised on the eighth day after birth.¹³

5 (Sotah 12a, cf. Josephus Antiquities II, 1.220)

6 Vayikra (Leviticus) Rabbah 36:4.

7 Genesis Rabbah 4:8

8 Genesis Rabbah 26:15.

9 Bereishit Rabbah 68:12

10 Babylonian Talmud: Tractate Soṭah 11a; Sanh. 106a; Pirke De-Rabbi Eliezer 48.

11 Babylonian Talmud: Tractate Sotah 11b, 12a; Meg. 14a; Exodus Rabbah. 1:24; Sefer ha-Yashar; Shemot, pp. 111a, 112b; comp. Josephus, "Ant." ii. 9, § 3

12 Yalkut Shimoni., Vayelech, 940

13 Pirke De-Rabbi Eliezer (Chapters of Rabbi Eliezer) is an aggadic-midrashic work on Genesis, part of Exodus, and a few sentences of Numbers, ascribed to R. Eliezer ben Hyrcanus (80-118 C.E.)

- A peculiar and glorious light filled the entire house at his birth¹⁴, indicating that he was worthy of the gift of prophecy.¹⁵
- He spoke with his father and mother on the day of his birth, and prophesied at the age of three.¹⁶

According to Rashi, the description of the baby being “good” refers to:

*When he was born the entire house was filled with light.*¹⁷

Based on biblical and extra-biblical considerations, Moses is the greatest prophet, leader and teacher that rabbinic Judaism has ever recognised.

Moses is affectionately called “Moshe Rabbeinu” (Moses, Our Teacher/our Rabbi). Moses brought God’s Torah to the Jewish people gathered at the foot of the mountain. The Torah contains 613 commandments, divided into 248 positive commandments and 365 negative commandments. The numerical value of the letters that make up the title “Moshe Rabbeinu” is 613.

From a human perspective, the character of Moses towers over the events and personalities in the Tanakh. For Jews, he is the quintessential prophet and teacher, the lawgiver, redeemer and the archetypal Jewish leader. All leaders, whether prophets or kings, have been measured against him.

THE BIBLE AND MOSES

The biblical record of Moses is impressive but certainly less spectacular. Great characters in the Bible are sometimes introduced without much background information. Abraham, for instance, the man who was chosen to be the first Jew, arrived in the text without any background in the biblical narrative, a situation which is compensated for by many rabbinic fables.

Moses is given a little more in the way of introduction but the details are sparse.

14 ibid, p.112b; Yalkut Shimoni.

15 Babylonian Talmud: Tractate Sotah 12a : 32

16 Midrash Petirat Moshe, in Jellinek, A. Beit ha-Midrash i. 128 (Jellinek published this (1853–1878) and included a large number of smaller Midrashim, ancient and medieval homilies and folklore records.)

17 Babylonian Talmud: Tractate Sotah 12a, Exod. Rabbah 1:20

The narrative of Moses' birth begins with Pharaoh's heartless decree (Exodus 1:16, 22)

16 When you serve as midwife to the Hebrew women and see them on the birthstool, if it is a son, you shall kill him, but if it is a daughter, she shall live.

22 Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, "Every son that is born to the Hebrews you shall cast into the Nile, but you shall let every daughter live."

Ironically Moses' mother was, in one sense, obeying the Pharaoh's edict to "throw" baby boys into the river by putting her son into the Nile.¹⁸ (Exodus 1:22)

Moses' birth is mentioned only briefly.

1 Now a man from the house of Levi went and took as his wife a Levite woman.

2 The woman conceived and bore a son, and when she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him three months.

No doubt the first Jewish martyr of the Early Church, Stephen, had both the biblical record and the rabbinic fables associated with Moses in mind when he states that Moses "was no ordinary child"¹⁹ (Acts 7:20 NIV). Stephen is joined in this sentiment by the writer to the Hebrews (Hebrews 11:23 NIV).

The names of Moses' parents are not given until Exodus 6:20 where it is stated that his father was Amram and his mother Yokheved, Amram's aunt. This Levite couple had two other children: Miriam (Exodus 15:20) and Aaron (Exodus 6:20). Aaron was three years older than Moses (7:7).

Unlike Abraham, the biblical account introduces Moses through four stories which inform the reader about the character of Moses.

18 Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1985). *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

19 ἦν ἀστεῖος τῷ θεῷ Lit. "he was fair to God" - Young's Literal Translation.

The first is the oppression by the task master of a Hebrew slave and Moses' sense of concern for the oppressed. In the second story Moses find two Jews quarrelling and his sense of justice is demonstrated. In the third story both the concern for the oppressed and the sense of justice are demonstrated. While sitting by the well, he sees Jethro's seven daughters being harassed by the other shepherds, and he saves them in a peaceful manner.

Following this introduction by three stories, the narrative moves forward forty years in Moses' life for the final introductory story - the encounter at the burning bush. (Exodus 3:2) In all these introductory stories the humanity and frailty of Moses are only too apparent. According to Jewish tradition Moses is the only human to have 'seen' God, in a dramatic encounter in Exodus 33-34. He is described as the only person who ever knew God face-to-face (Deuteronomy 34:10) and mouth-to-mouth (Numbers 12:6-8), which implies that God spoke to Moses directly, in plain language, not through visions and dreams, as God communicated with other prophets in the Hebrew Scriptures. Moses was the founding prophet of Torah faith. ²⁰

Numbers 12:6-7 shows God's high regard for Moses.

He said, "Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the LORD, shall make Myself known to him in a vision. I shall speak with him in a dream. Not so with My servant Moses, He is faithful in all My household".

Yet Moses is called "the servant of God", he is neither a king nor a ruler. He was only a servant in God's house. God's eulogy for Moses, if we can call it that, stresses this fact:

'Moses my servant is dead.' (Joshua 1:2).

There is no dishonour in being a servant of God.

Moses is also referred to as a servant elsewhere.

"Remember the law of my servant Moses,..." (Malachi 4:4)

20 Riggans, W. 1998 Focus on the Bible: Hebrews. Great Britain. Focus Publications. p37

*“And Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab.”
(Deuteronomy 34:5)*

(This term “servant” is applied to him more than any other person in the Bible, including Yeshua.) His crowning description comes from Numbers 12:3 (NIV)

“Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.”

We presume, of course, with those who are convinced of the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, that Moses did not write this verse about himself. Moses achieves what the vast majority of leaders find so elusive - the ability to remain humble when in a position of power and the ability to remain a servant when in charge.

THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS AND THE SECOND MOSES

The message of the Gospels is that Yeshua the Nazarene is the prophet spoken of by Moses in the Torah.

*“The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me [Moses] from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him.”
(Deuteronomy 18:15 (NIV))*

It is not surprising that the experience of the Exodus and the character of its leader should have impressed the mind of Israel to such an extent that the future would be anticipated in this mould. The first Exodus was taught to succeeding generations as an eternal revelation of God.²¹

God also said to Moses, “Say to the Israelites, ‘The Lord, the God of your fathers — the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob — has sent me to you.’ This is my name forever, the name you shall call me from generation to generation.” (Exodus 3:15).

21 Ryken, L., Wilhoit, J., Longman, T., Duriez, C., Penney, D., & Reid, D. G. (2000). Dictionary of biblical imagery (electronic ed.). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

The conception of the second Exodus is not always presented in a specifically Messianic setting. Sometimes the fact is stressed that God will repeat what He did at the Exodus, only in a way that surpasses the first. In these instances no man is mentioned through whom God will work as He formerly did through Moses. (Hosea 2:14–23; Jeremiah 31:31–34; Ezekiel 20:33–44.) Most of these verses refer primarily to the restoration after the Babylonian captivity. Sometimes, however, the promise of a second Exodus is Messianic. (Isaiah 51:9–11; 52:12; Jeremiah 23:5–8).

Professor Risto Santala states that

“...the Messiah as the second Moses in Rabbinical literature presents parallels between similar types of fact, following the qal va homer (from the light to the heavy) Jewish principle of interpretation... In the same way one of the most frequently used parallels is the likening of Messiah to the first saviour, Moses.”²²

If we follow the advice of the Talmud in that

“All the prophets prophesied only for the days of Messiah”²³

we can see how important these themes are for understanding the Messiah in the light of Jewish expectation in the first century.

The emphasis on Yeshua’s Jewish identity, and the insistence that His life was a fulfilment of prophecy, can be traced from the genealogy to the birth narrative and through the rest of the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew further emphasises Yeshua’s importance to Judaism by modelling His birth and ministry on Moses’ birth and mission. Yeshua is pictured as the second Moses and so we should expect to see all kinds of parallels, both in terms of the events of their lives and their characters. The gospels are filled with these similarities but they simultaneously emphasise key differences because, according to their message, One greater than Moses has come.

22 Santala, R. 1992 *The Messiah in the Old Testament in the light of Rabbinical Writings*. Jerusalem Keren Ahvah Meshihit pg 37

23 Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 99a; Berachot 34b.

According to Matthew, people do not need to choose between Yeshua and Moses nor must they choose between Yeshua's teaching and Moses' Torah. Yeshua teaches the Torah delivered to Moses with authority because He is both its author and therefore its ultimate interpreter. Both Moses and Yeshua were born when the Israelites lived under an oppressive ruler.

Rabbi Allan Kensky, the Associate Dean of the Rabbinical School of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, points out the following parallels between the birth stories of Moses and Yeshua in the biblical record:

- In Matthew 2:13-14, Herod was going to search for the child to destroy Him, so Joseph took the child and His mother and went away. In Exodus 2:15, Pharaoh sought to do away with Moses, so Moses went away.
- Herod's massacre of the boys in Bethlehem parallels Pharaoh's command to throw the Hebrew children into the Nile.
- In Matthew 2:19, Herod dies; in Exodus 2:23, the king of Egypt dies.
- In Matthew 2:19-20, the angel of the Lord says to Joseph in Egypt, "Go back to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child's life are dead." The language is similar to Exodus 4:19, "The Lord said to Moses in Midian, 'Return to Egypt, for those who were seeking your life are dead.'"²⁴

In addition to Kensky's parallels, there are other aspects that the biblical birth stories have in common.

- Yokheved, Moses' mother, hid him from Pharaoh (Exodus 2:2) and, at the direction of an angel, the child Yeshua was hidden from Herod (Matthew 2:13)
- Both were born and had been found in unusual places. Moses was found in the water floating in a basket (Exodus 2:3); Yeshua is found in a manger (a stone trough) wrapped in cloths (Luke 2:7), both of which are described as a sign.
- Pharaoh's daughter adopted Moses as her own son (Exodus 2:10); Joseph adopted Yeshua as his own son (Matthew 1:25/Luke 2:48).
- Moses was sent into Egypt to preserve his life (Exodus 2:3-4); Yeshua was taken into Egypt to preserve His life from Herod's infanticide (Matthew 2:13-15).

24 Kensky, A. "Moses and Jesus: the birth of the Savior". Judaism. FindArticles.com. 08 Jun, 2012.

The Talmud maintains that ‘Yeshua was a magician and learned His skills in Egypt’.²⁵ Though it comes from a hostile source, it is clear confirmation for the miracles of Yeshua and for His stay in Egypt where the Talmudic writers (wrongly) thought He was educated. The escape to Egypt was historical but it was also highly symbolic, and Matthew has this in mind. It was a recapitulation, a fulfilment, of Israel’s history. The journey into Egypt at the invitation of the Patriarch Joseph, and the exodus from Egypt under the leadership of Moses was the journey of identity of this people as they became the nation Israel and the people of God. Pharaoh tried to destroy the people in Egypt but Moses brought them out of Egypt into the land of promise. Herod, a new Pharaoh, tried to kill the firstborn, Yeshua, and in his rage he slaughtered other innocent firstborn in Bethlehem. He failed to kill the Saviour, just as Pharaoh had failed to kill Moses. Eventually, Moses brought the children of Israel out of the land of bondage and death, and Moses’ successor was to bring the people out of a worse bondage and a worse death, the death of sin.²⁶

Not only are there parallels with the biblical birth accounts of Moses and Yeshua, the Midrashic tales of Moses offer additional parallels:

- The impending birth of each is announced to Herod and Pharaoh respectively, and both monarchs are filled with dread at the news.
- Amram is told that his wife will give birth to a son who will save Israel; Joseph is told that Mary’s son will be called Yeshua “for He will save the people from their sins.” (It should be noted that “from their sins” may be a later gloss.²⁷)
- The birth of Yeshua is heralded by a star; at the birth of Moses there is great light. From the start, both children are recognised as extraordinary.
- Joseph espouses Mary while she is pregnant. This has an interesting parallel in a cryptic statement found in the Talmud that Amram married – or rather remarried – Yokheved while she was already pregnant.²⁸

25 Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 107b; 43a; Shabbat 104b

26 Green, Michael 2000 BST Commentary: The Message of Matthew Leicester England: IVP p.71

27 P. Winter, “Jewish Folklore in the Matthean Birth Story,” *Hibbert Journal* 53 (1954-55):40.

28 Allan Kensky “Moses and Jesus: the birth of the Savior”. *Judaism. FindArticles.com*. 08 Jun, 2012.

Kensky points out further:

There is one feature of the birth of Jesus which seems to have no antecedent in the Moses accounts: the idea of the virgin conception. It is commonly believed that “there was no Jewish expectation that the Messiah would be God’s son in the sense of having been conceived without a male parent.”²⁹ Traces of such an idea can, however, be found, and it is possible that there was at some point a legend about the supernatural conception of Moses, a legend that was later suppressed because of its similarities to the Jesus story.³⁰

The idea of supernatural conception is not totally alien to the history of Judaism.³¹

THE STRUCTURE OF MATTHEW’S GOSPEL

Matthew’s gospel is structured to reflect the five books of Moses.³² The five sections of teaching are introduced by an introductory passage and a concluding passage, like bookends on a shelf. Each section concludes with the words “had finished” in the sentence. The modern chapter divisions do not reflect this arrangement and consequently make the divisions less obvious to the reader. By this arrangement Matthew emphasises the Jewish character and context of his message.

29 Brown, Raymond E. 1979 *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in Matthew and Luke*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday,

30 Kensky, A. “Moses and Jesus: the birth of the Savior”. *Judaism*. FindArticles.com. 08 Jun, 2012.

31 Erwin R. Goodenough, *By Light, Light: The Mystic Gospel of Hellenistic Judaism* (New Haven, 1935), p. 155. quoted in Kensky.

32 Introduction Matthew 1:1-4:25;
Section One Matthew 5:1-7:28;
Section Two Matthew 8:1-11:1;
Section Three Matthew 11:2-13:53
Section Four Matthew 13:54-19:1
Section Five Matthew 19:3-26:1
Conclusion Matthew 26:2-28:20

YESHUA'S MINISTRY REFLECTS MANY ASPECTS OF MOSES' MISSION

- Both Moses and Yeshua experienced opposition from their community and family. Moses had Miriam and Aaron speak against him taking a Cushite wife (Numbers 12:1); Yeshua had his family criticize and reject his ministry (Matthew 13:54 - 57, John 7:3).
- Moses and Yeshua both fasted forty days and nights in the wilderness to bring a covenant to Israel. Moses on the top of Mount Sinai (Exodus 24:18, 34:28, Deuteronomy 9:9); Yeshua in the desert as the Son of God (Matthew 4:2).
- Moses and Yeshua are remembered for their “face-to-face” relationship with God unlike any other person. Moses (Exodus 33:9-11, Deuteronomy 34:10; Numbers 12:7-8); Yeshua was with God, face-to-face from eternity (John 1:1, 18).
- Indicative of their relationship with God, both Moses and Yeshua heard God speak audibly and directly from heaven. In the case of Moses (Exodus 20:22, 24:12-16), and Yeshua (Matthew 3:17; John 12:28). Both Moses and Yeshua intercede on behalf of the people of Israel. In their intercessory prayers, they were willing to bear the consequences of the people's sins. Moses asked to be blotted out of the book of life for the people's sake (Exodus 32:32-33). Yeshua asked for them to be kept from falling away (John 17:9-17). Yeshua asked for those to be forgiven while He bore the consequences in their place (Luke 23:34, 2 Corinthians 5:19, 1 Peter.2:21-24, Isaiah 53:8).
- Moses and Yeshua were God's spokesmen to and for the people: Moses (Exodus 9:35; Numbers 12:2), and Yeshua (Hebrews 1:1-3).
- Their words were oracles of God: Moses (Deuteronomy 18:18), and Yeshua (John 14:24, 5:24).
- Moses and Yeshua both predicted Israel's history (Deuteronomy 28:15-28; Matthew 23:34, 24:1, 2, 8, 34) and spoke out against Israel's enemies and persecutors (Deuteronomy 23:3-4; Matthew 25:41-48).
- Both Moses and Yeshua reflected and were shown the glory of God. Moses reflected his glory temporarily (Exodus 34:29-35; 2 Corinthians 3:7-14). Yeshua at the transfiguration; His face shone brighter than the sun revealing His true nature. (Matthew 17:2; John 1:14).
- Both were known for their humility and meekness as God's servants:

- Moses (Numbers 12:3), and Yeshua (Matthew 11:29; Philippians 2:3-8).
- Yeshua and Moses both cleansed members of the Israelite community from leprosy. References to the rite of purification in the Hebrew Scriptures do not refer to a cure but only recognition of the fact that a suspected leper was free from the illness or that he never really had incurable leprosy. He could then be reconciled to society. From Moses' time no one that was Jewish was cleansed until Yeshua came (Numbers 12:10-16, Mark 1:40-41). This is a very significant factor that indicates that Yeshua was the prophet of which Moses spoke. For this reason it was considered one of the Messianic signs. (The single exception is Elisha who cured Na'aman the Syrian (2 Kings 5:1-19). The fact that this miraculous healing was performed on a person who was outside of the community of Israel sets it apart from the healings performed by Moses and Yeshua.)
 - Yeshua and Moses fed Israel miraculously, Moses with manna in the wilderness (Exodus 16:14-17), and Yeshua with the five loaves and two fish fed four and five thousand on two occasions (Matthew 14:19-21).
 - Both had the forces of nature obey them (the Red Sea): Moses (Exodus 14:21-22), and Yeshua the Sea of Galilee (Matthew 8:26-27).
 - Each had seventy helpers: Moses (Numbers 11:16-17), and Yeshua (Luke 10:1).
 - Moses and Yeshua each established a priesthood. Moses began the Aaronic priesthood, which was temporary under the Torah (Leviticus 9; Numbers 8:20-26; Hebrews 9:19-22). Yeshua established an eternal priesthood under the new covenant in which He alone functions as the high priest forever. (Hebrews 7:17,19,23,25-28; 9:12)
 - Moses and Yeshua were sent by God to reveal His name, person and instruction to the people. To Moses, God said to tell them I Am sent you. (Exodus 3:13-14). Yeshua said that God had sent Him as His exact representative revealing His name (I Am) and nature to the people. (John 8:42; 17:6,11-12; Colossians 2:9; Hebrews 1:3).
 - Moses and Yeshua were involved in presenting the covenant to the people. As the Gospel of John states it (John 1:17) "*the grace of the Torah came through Moses and grace and truth was realised through Jesus the Messiah.*" At the feast of Shavuot Moses gave the Torah in the presence of the Spirit. At the feast of Shavuot (Pentecost) in the new covenant Yeshua gave the Spirit in the presence of the Word (Acts 2).
 - Moses and Yeshua brought deliverance to the Jewish people: those who followed Moses out of the bondage of slavery to Egypt. (Exodus 3:7-8, 10;

12:31-33, 42), and Yeshua brought people out of a greater bondage, slavery to sin (Romans 3:24-25,6:6-7,8:2-4; Ephesians 1:7; Hebrews 9:26).

- Moses and Yeshua both had an angel guard their graves. After Moses died, Michael the Archangel guarded his body. (Jude 9) When Yeshua rose an angel guarded His tomb (Matthew 26:2-6).
- Yeshua and Moses re-appeared after they died: Moses (Matthew 17:3 with Yeshua at His transfiguration) and Yeshua at His resurrection. (Acts 1:3)

WHAT CONCLUSION CAN WE DRAW FROM THIS EVIDENCE?

Yeshua is cast as the successor of Moses: He came to save His people from their sins. The five great sections of His teaching in Matthew's Gospel take up and fulfil the five great books of the Torah revealed to Moses. Yeshua fulfils, not in the sense of making obsolete, but in the sense of making full or fully revealing the first intention. Here, Yeshua is seen as the counterpart to Moses, not so much in revelation as in redemption. He is going to bring about the new exodus not only to a Promised Land but to an Eternal Kingdom.

The Lord gave a promise to the people of Israel that there would be a prophet like Moses in their future.

“The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him... ‘I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put My words in his mouth... If anyone does not listen to My words that the prophetspeaks in My name, I Myself will call him to account.’” (Deuteronomy 18:15, 18-19)

Professor Risto Santala points to a midrashic text which gives a remarkable description of the Messiah.

“The Rabbinic literature often presents parallels between similar types of fact. Sometimes this comparison is developed by the qal va homer principle – from the simple to the more complex; sometimes the matter is brought to life with an appropriate illustration.”

One of the most frequently used parallels is the likening of the Messiah to the “first saviour”, Moses.³³

The Midrashic literature on Moses speaks of the ‘First’ and the ‘Last’ Saviours. Midrash Rabbah on Ecclesiastes relates how R. Berechiah said in the name of R. Yitshak, who lived before the year 300 AD, that:

“Just as there was a First Saviour so there will be a Last. Just as it is said of the First Saviour (Exodus 4:20) that ‘He took his wife and sons and put them on a donkey’, so it is said of the Last Saviour that ‘He is lowly and riding on a donkey’(Zechariah 9:9).

As the First Saviour provided manna (Exodus 16), as it is written, ‘Behold I will pour out bread from heaven upon you,’ so will the Last Saviour, as it is written (Psalm 72:16), ‘Let corn abound throughout the land’.

Just as the First Saviour opened a fountain, so the Last Saviour will provide water, as it is written (Joel 3:18), ‘A fountain will flow out of the LORD’S house’”³⁴

Those familiar with the Gospel accounts will know that all the characteristics and deeds mentioned above are demonstrated in the life and teaching of Yeshua:

- Yeshua entered Jerusalem showing humility by riding on a donkey (Matthew 21:1-11).
- Yeshua fed the multitudes (Matthew 14:13-21, Mark 6:31-44, Luke 9:10-17 and John 6:5-15). (This miracle is also known as the miracle of the five loaves and two fish.)
- The second miracle, “The Feeding of the 4,000” is reported by Mark 8:1-9 and Matthew 15:32-39.
- The final picture of the Last Saviour providing water from the Lord’s house is demonstrated by Yeshua at the festival of Sukkot in the Temple precincts (John 7:37-38).

33 Santala, R. 1992 The Messiah in the Old Testament in the light of Rabbinical Writings. Jerusalem Keren Ahvah Meshihit pg 59

34 Ibid

Amongst Christians, a similar parallelism appears as early as Yeshua's statement that, "*If you believed Moses you would believe Me, because he wrote about Me*" (John 5:46). Those who listened to Him sometimes exclaimed, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote" (John 1:45).

One of the most iconic representations of Yeshua is as the itinerant teacher in Galilee, giving a collection of Torah midrashim known as "The Sermon on the Mount" (Matthew 5-7).

As a tour leader, I always experience a little apprehension when I take people to the traditional site of this teaching. My hesitation is based on the fact that most people are expecting a mountain when the best the area has to offer is a slight incline or a hill. Whether the term *Sermon on the Mount* can be properly used for the somewhat parallel portion in Luke (6:20–49) depends upon one's interpretation of the literary relationship between the two. The latter is often called the *Sermon on the Plain* because it is said to have been delivered on 'a level place' (Luke 6:17) rather than 'on the mountain' (Matthew 5:1). But both expressions probably denote the same place approached from two different directions. Most scholars are of the opinion that the Sermon is really a compilation of sayings of the Lord:

'a kind of epitome of all the sermons that Jesus ever preached'.³⁵

The question is why would Matthew associate this teaching with a mountain? The answer has less to do with geography and more to do with history. Matthew, unsurprisingly, has Moses in mind.

The LORD said to Moses, "Come up to me on the mountain and wait there, that I may give you the tablets of stone, with the law and the commandment, which I have written for their instruction."

(Exodus 24:12)

See, I [Moses] have taught you statutes and rules, as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should do them in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. (Deuteronomy 4:5)

35 Barclay, W. 2001 *The Gospel of Matthew*, Westminster John Knox Press, p. 79

Like Moses, Yeshua gives instruction from a mountain. Moses' revelation on Mount Sinai is pictured by Matthew here (Exodus 19:3-5).

Moses went up to God. The LORD called to him out of the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine;

Yeshua takes His place with those who "sit in Moses' seat" (Matthew 23:2) to teach. Matthew's depiction of Yeshua' teaching is appropriate. Yeshua sat to teach (Matthew 5:1; compare 13:1-2; 23:2) which fits expected patterns of Jewish instruction (see also Luke 4:20). Thus Yeshua takes the role of the scribes but Matthew's allusion to Moses indicates that Yeshua is a greater teacher with more authority than the scribes.

And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at His teaching, for He was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes. (Matthew 7:28-29 cf Mark 1:22)

THE TRANSFIGURATION

How are we to understand the Transfiguration of Yeshua and appearance of Moses and Elijah on the mountain? Why was Yeshua transfigured? Why is this event recorded in all three synoptic gospels?

The purpose and meaning of the transfiguration of Yeshua are seldom fully appreciated. (Luke 9:28-36; Mark 9:2-10; Matthew 17:1-8) Certainly it was a Jewish event, even to the point of wanting to build three sukkot (shelters). So let's look at this event through Jewish eyes and see what this perspective teaches us.

Yeshua took Peter, James and John, His closest disciples, to a high mountain to pray. There, presumably while they were praying, the disciples witnessed Yeshua's transfiguration. Yeshua disclosed His glory. In other words the glory was always there but was laid aside when He took human form. Essentially

this was not a new miracle, but the temporary cessation of an ongoing one. The real miracle was that Yeshua, most of the time, could keep from displaying this glory.

[Yeshua], although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Philippians 2:6-8

Suddenly the disciples see their rabbi shining like the sun, the veil of flesh no longer able to conceal His true identity.

The disciples witnessed Him conversing with Moses and Elijah, demonstrating His continuity with the Torah and the Prophets. The disciples, together with Jesus, are surrounded by a cloud - reminiscent of the cloud of glory, the Shekinah of God's Presence at the Tabernacle in the wilderness. Then a voice from heaven proclaims: 'This is My Son, My Chosen One; Listen to Him'³⁶

The event is made up of three major features.

- i. The Glory in the Cloud
- ii. The presence of Moses and Elijah
- iii. The Voice from heaven (Exodus 19:9).

I. THE GLORY

The cloud of the presence overshadows the mountain. In the transfiguration of Yeshua, the light may be compared to the radiant faces of the righteous. It is somewhat like the face of Moses which glowed after he talked with God and came down from Mount Sinai. (Exodus 19:18; 24:18; 34:29-35.)

The description of brilliance attempts to express the incomprehensible splendour of God Himself. In the Hebrew Bible, this stunning glory of the Lord is often called the *kavod Yhvh*. It portrays His majestic omnipotence

36 Pryor, D.A. 2005 Behold the Man. Dayton Ohio: Centre for Judaic-Christian Studies

as the ultimate power. In the rabbinic literature the splendour of the divine presence is described by the Hebrew terms *ziv shekhinah*. Perhaps the very skin of Yeshua shone so brightly that His garments glowed from the light. His countenance is changed, His clothes are dazzling white, and the brightness of the awesome reality of God is revealed. Such glory only comes from the radiance of the divine presence.³⁷

The awesome presence of God, often described as glory (which is pictured by the prophet Ezekiel (Ezekiel 8-11) as departing from the Temple and Israel and returning in the shepherds fields at the announcement of Yeshua's birth (Luke 2:9)) now rests on Yeshua.

The cloud on the Mount of Transfiguration is like the cloud in the Bible which portrayed God's glory in His acts of salvation. The cloud went before the people as God's protection in Exodus 13:21. The Lord Himself descends in a cloud in Numbers 12:5. Once again, the Lord appeared in the tabernacle in a cloud which depicted His majestic glory and supernatural power (Deuteronomy 31:15). The Lord tells Moses:

“Lo, I am coming unto you in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and may also believe you forever” (Exodus 19:9)

In 2 Chronicles 5:13-14 all the people gather to praise and exalt the Lord when Solomon's temple is dedicated. As they proclaim the goodness and the mercy of the Lord, the cloud fills the temple,

“So that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord filled the house of God.” (2 Chronicles 5:15)

In a similar way the cloud in the story of the transfiguration of Yeshua portrays the overwhelming presence of God. The voice of God speaks from the cloud as in Exodus 19:9.³⁸

37 Young, B.H 1995 *Jesus the Jewish Theologian*. Massachusetts : Hendrickson Publishers p.211

38 Young, B.H 1995 *Jesus the Jewish Theologian*. Massachusetts : Hendrickson Publishers p.208

II. THE PRESENCE OF MOSES AND ELIJAH

Looking at any biblical event from a Jewish perspective demands a multi-layered approach. The significance of these two prophets, Moses and Elijah, connects the event to the Hebrew Scriptures. Another layer of significance is the subject of their conversation, namely, Yeshua's exodus from Jerusalem. Yeshua died during Pesach, the remembrance of the exodus. The Passover Seder focuses on two characters: Moses the servant of God who led the people out of Egyptian slavery to receive the Torah in the wilderness, and Elijah, who is also mentioned during the Passover Seder. A place is kept for him at the table in case he should come. In Jewish thought, Elijah is often associated with the future deliverance of God's people.³⁹ Moses represented the Torah, and Elijah represented the Prophets. The first and last of the prophets, Moses and Elijah, speak about his *exodus*⁴⁰ in Jerusalem.⁴¹ This conversation with the most revered prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures ties Yeshua's exodus to the Hebrew Scriptures. This is not a new religion or philosophy but the fulfilment of what is written. In fulfilment of the Torah requirement, there are two witnesses to the event. The Torah says:

“One witness shall not arise against a man for any sin or guilt that he may commit; according to two witnesses or according to three witnesses a matter shall stand.” Deuteronomy 19:15

Thus, two witnesses provide conclusive proof of reality but one witness does not. By the testimony of two or more witnesses, the truth is established. All the law and prophets testify of the Son.

39 Ibid

40 In Hebrew, the Greek word exodos would be translated by the term yetzeah “going out, departure.” This is a literal Hebrew translation. It is the root word used in the famous self-designation of God, “I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt . . .” (Exodus 20:2). Probably the Greek term exodos was used to translate the more shocking Hebrew word mavet “death.” If so, the Greek translator might be giving his understanding of the cross. It is an exodus rather than a death. B. H. Young

41 Young, B.H 1995 Jesus the Jewish Theologian. Massachusetts : Hendrickson Publishers p.211

III. THE VOICE FROM HEAVEN

On three distinct occasions, the voice from heaven is heard confirming the identity and mission of Yeshua: at His baptism, at His transfiguration and during the last week in Jerusalem before His exodus.

“and the Holy Spirit descended on Him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son whom I love; with You I am well pleased.” (Luke 3:22)

“A voice came from the cloud saying, “This is My Son, whom I have chosen; listen to Him.” (Luke 9:35)

“Father, glorify Your name!” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.” (John 12:28)

The Father’s threefold proclamation of Yeshua’s identity correlating with the three-fold division of the Hebrew Bible.

In Jewish tradition, the title, Tanakh (TaNaKh), is used for the Hebrew Bible (instead of the Christian designation, “Old Testament”. Tanakh is an acronym:

“T” for the Torah (the first five books of Moses),

“N” for the Nevi’im (the Prophetic books),

“K” for the Ketuvim (the Writings, the largest section of which is the Psalms).

God the Father’s declaration at the Transfiguration is a “kesher” or linking of Yeshua to each of these three divisions of the Hebrew Bible:

Torah: Deuteronomy 18:15

The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to Him.

Nevi'im: Isaiah 42:1

*Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight;
I will put my Spirit on Him, and He will bring justice to the nations.*

Ketuvim: Psalm 2:7

*I will proclaim the Lord's decree: He said to me, 'You are my son; today I
have become your father.*

In other words, the Father is saying that Yeshua is the fullness of the Torah, the Prophets and the Writings i.e. the Tanakh. He is the Hebrew Scriptures, or the Word of God, enfleshed.⁴²

YESHUA GREATER THAN MOSES

Messianic Jewish scholar David Stern expressed this well:

Was Yeshua "a prophet like Moshe"? Yes, and more. A prophet speaks for God, which Yeshua did; but he also spoke as God. He spoke what the Father gave Him to say, as did all the prophets; but He and the Father are one [John 10:31]. Moshe explained the sacrificial system for atonement; Yeshua was the final sacrifice for sin, the eternally effective atonement. Moshe established the system of cohanim [priests], with his brother Aaron as the first cohen gadol [high priest] of the Tabernacle; the resurrected Yeshua is the eternal cohen gadol in the heavenly Tabernacle that served as a model for the earthly one [Heb. 7—10]. At no point did Yeshua contradict what Moshe said; rather He clarified and strengthened the Torah [Matt. 5:17—20], made its application plainer [Matthew 5:21—7:29], and sometimes Himself was the application.⁴³

I will end this comparative article with a midrash on Isaiah 52:13.

A famous rabbinic homily or midrash on this verse, one often associated with the Messiah even in traditional Jewish thought, reads:

42 Pryor, D.A. 2005 Behold the Man. Dayton Ohio: Centre for Judaic-Christian Studies

43 Stern, D. The Jewish New Testament Commentary p.664

“See, my servant will act wisely; He will be high and lifted up and exceedingly lofty.”

Commenting on this verse, the midrash states:

Who art thou, O great mountain? (Zechariah 4:7) This refers to the King Messiah. And why does he call him “the great mountain?” because he is greater than the patriarchs, as it is said, “My servant shall be high, and lifted up, and lofty exceedingly”—he will be higher than Abraham, who says, “I raise high my hands unto the Lord” (Genesis 14:22); lifted up above Moses, to whom it is said, “Lift it up into thy bosom” (Numbers 11:12); loftier than the ministering angels, of whom it is written, “Their wheels were lofty and terrible” (Ezekiel 1:18). And out of whom does he come forth? Out of David.⁴⁴

This character of a servant, which is so strongly associated with Moses, is demonstrated par excellence in Yeshua.

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:5-11)

44 Yalqut Shim’oni, 2:53:3 quoted in Stern, D. The Jewish New Testament Commentary p.664

© John Atkinson 2013

The right of John Atkinson to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted in accordance with the Copyright Design and Patents Act 1988. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reprinted or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Editorial team: John Atkinson & Rev Alex Jacob
Concept and design: 18TWO Design
Printed through: A-Tec, Broxbourne, England

