

Vayera	And I appeared	The Battle of the Gods Begins
Torah:	Genesis 6:2-9:35	
Haftarah:	Ezekiel 28:25-29:21	
Brit Chadashah:	Revelation 16:1-21	

Our passage deals with a series of initial refusals by Pharaoh over an entire year, as one by one, his pagan gods are defeated by the G-d of the Hebrews. After the people's initial disbelief, because of the severity of their mistreatment, YHVH gives Moses a brief summary of how He will secure their freedom. After this, Moses laments his inability to speak well, but when YHVH is with us, it does not matter how well we speak, as long as we speak His Word.

In between the two complaints by Moses, his family's genealogy is given. Genealogies function to mark transitions in a story and to identify specific people, since people at this time did not have last names. We learn that from the birth of Levi, to the death of Amram, Moses' father, there are 407 years. Not all the time in Egypt was spent living under oppression. It was only when there was a regime change that the fortunes of the Jewish people declined.

We also learn that Moses' father married his aunt, Jochebed, Moses' mother. The prohibitions against marrying close relatives were not yet given. Aaron's son and his grandson are also mentioned in the genealogy. We have to remember that the genealogies are not always exhaustive and the rabbi's were wrong to use them to calculate the date of creation. We do not know how long the garden existed before Adam and Eve were put in the middle of it, nor how long they lived before they were expelled from the garden.

In the next chapter we learn that Aaron was 83 and Moses was 80, when they began their ministry. The passages are not always clear when they say that Moses said to Pharaoh or that Moses performed signs before Pharaoh. From a close reading of the texts we learn that YHVH spoke to Moses and Moses spoke to Aaron and it was Aaron who spoke to Pharaoh and who performed all the signs and wonders over the year it took to reach the last plague.

We know from history, at the beginning of each Egyptian month, Pharaoh would go down to the Nile and perform a blessing ceremony in honour of the god for whom the month was named. We know that there were ten plagues, so the period of judgment would have lasted at least ten months and would have targeted the principle gods of Egypt. They had any number of minor gods, but had certain gods whose favour and protection extended over a specific month. It was not uncommon for ancient calendars to only have 10 months.

Moses has already performed at least two signs, but the first sign he performs in the presence of Pharaoh was when Aaron's rod turned into a snake. The Egyptian magicians could also turn their rods into snakes, though with the magicians, I am not certain if it was not just a slight of hand and not an actual transformation. To show that the hand of G-d always trumps the hand of any magician or sorcerer, Aaron's snake swallows the snakes of the magicians before turning back into a rod.

Pharaoh is not very impressed with what he considers to be magic tricks on par with what his own sorcerers and magician could perform. It is going to take some convincing before he will consider letting the Hebrews leave Egypt.

There are two categories of plagues, those which come from the earth and those which come from the sky. Each plague turns the symbol of an Egyptian god into a curse. Throughout the process, many Egyptians started to fear YHVH and a large number of them converted to Judaism and left Egypt with the House of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

The whole life and economy of Egypt relied on the waters of the Nile, from the spring when the waters would rise as the snow melted at the sources of the Nile, to just before winter when many different crops were harvested. We learn from history, that the region around Egypt slowly turned into a desert, starting around four thousand years ago. We also know that when our people wandered in the wilderness, it was not yet the desert it is today.

For some unknown reason, the water table in the region started dropping and it is still doing so today. The region used to have abundant wild life, including elephants which Hannibal used against the Romans. There were also many cities and villages that were slowly abandoned as the region turned into a desert. The process was just beginning to happen when our people came out of Egypt, so their journey to the Holy Land was through an area of good grazing and abundant forests.

YHVH turned the waters of the Nile into a murky substance that is called blood, because it was red and thicker than the water usually is. All the water of Egypt was turned to blood, even the standing water that they had in vases of wood and stone. All the fish in the river died and the river stank as these carcasses rotted. The people had to dig wells in order to find drinkable water.

The Egyptian magicians could imitate this plague, so Pharaoh was not yet intimidated by YHVH. Each of the plagues happened at the beginning of each month as Pharaoh came down to the Nile to perform religious devotions to various pagan gods.

The next plague is frogs which came out of the river and covered the land. Even though his magicians could also imitate this plague, Pharaoh gives in a little bit and asks Moses to remove the frogs. On Moses' word the frogs died and piles of their dead bodies were found throughout the land.

The third plague was an infestation of lice upon both men and animals. This time the magicians can not duplicate the plague and they admit that it is the finger of G-d. Moses may have caused the plague to end, but nonetheless, Pharaoh was not going to release the people.

This plague is followed by venomous flies, the death of many of the farm animals of Egypt and open sores which erupt of both men and animals. The magicians could not appear before Pharaoh when Moses unleashed the sixth plague because they were all covered in open sores. The last four plagues come from the sky and defeat the mightiest gods of Egypt. Plague number seven is rain and hail which killed anyone who did not shelter inside. There was no hail or heavy rain or lightening flashes in Goshen, where the children of Israel lived.

Pharaoh has to learn that he is messing with the only true, mighty G-d and that none of his false gods could either stand up to YHVH or rescue Egypt from His plagues. He has to be totally defeated and crushed so that he would be in no condition to come after the Jews, once he let them go. When he attempted to do so, he lost his elite army and Egypt was thrown into turmoil. It would take years for the devastated country to recover.

Sermon: Sowing Spirituality in a Darkening World.

Recently, my wife bought me a copy of the New York Times 2022 World Almanac. In the section that gave brief summaries of all the countries in the world, details are given about the various religions which are practised around the world. Two new religious affiliations are listed: agnostic and atheist. An agnostic is someone who is unsure about what they believe, even though they acknowledge that some power or powers hold the universe together. An atheist is someone who does not believe in any higher being and that we are totally alone in this world.

I was surprised that the number of agnostics and atheists is on the rise worldwide. Now, I realize that some people identify themselves with a religion which they do not practise and that they lead totally secular lives, except for funerals, weddings and major religious holidays. We have just passed the biggest religious holiday in the world – Christmas, but the vast majority of people celebrate the exchange of gifts and family gatherings, and ignore the story of the Baby who was born in a manger.

They may sing a carol or two and some may even attend a church service, but they are not believers in any true sense. It is only at Christmas and, to a lesser degree, Easter, when the churches fill up, and they stand nearly empty for the rest of the year. Montreal used to be called the city of one hundred bells, because that was the number of Catholic parishes within the city. Now churches are being converted in condos or garages and it seems to be sponsoring bingo that keeps most parishes afloat.

Most protestant churches are not doing any better and the same is true of most synagogues. People are no longer very concerned with spirituality, except as some kind of cultural heritage which is slowly disappearing. People now assume that the clergy exists to marry people and to bury them, along with providing comfort and guidance when people get into trouble.

Now, even though I am very willing to perform weddings and even funerals, I have a higher purpose. I do provide counselling for many people, some of whom are not believers in the true sense of the word. My main objective is to encourage people to come to faith and to live a life which revolves around the teachings of the Bible.

I guess you could call me a fundamentalist, but only in the sense that I adhere to the basic fundamentals of what the Bible teaches about G-d and how to live a life of faith and obedience. I am not trying to get followers who would give me most of their money, but I believe that tithing 10% of your increase is a clear biblical requirement. I am neither brainwashing people so that they commit crimes for me or believe that they have to blindly follow everything that I say to them.

I am also not sexually abusing or interfering with people under the guise of spirituality. People may suspect me of any of these things and may be confused why I still believe in the Bible and have not adopted the politically correct evolutionary humanism. My religion is not a form of mythology that just tells interesting stories and promotes good values.

I believe that YHVH, the G-d of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe and that a few thousand years ago, He took on a human form and walked among us. I believe, He died, rose again, ascended and will one day return.

I do not believe that all religions are just different versions of the same truths, or that modern science holds the key to the origin of the universe and the meaning of life. I believe in a literal Heaven which is the dwelling place for the full presence of G-d. I believe that one day our Messiah will return and judge every person who has ever lived. I believe in a literal lake of fire which will consume the souls of unbelievers and compromised believers.

This does not make me narrow minded and judgmental and there are no facts or realities which I am consciously ignoring or suppressing. Biblical morality has not suddenly become irrelevant and no longer applicable. I am not somehow living in a world that our modern society has grown out of. Believing in the truths of the Bible does not make someone spiritually immature or unenlightened. Quite the opposite is true.

Belief in the Bible and in biblical spirituality may be more and more out of fashion, but not on the basis of new evidence that has been presented. Over my fifty years in the faith, I have watched evolution grow in strength and win more converts, even though there remains no real, objective evidence for such a fantastic, unrealistic set of assumptions. Science is the world's new religion and fewer and fewer people are accepting faith based explanations for the origin and meaning of life. This does not make the Bible less true or less relevant.

Some people have pulled their children out of the public and separate school systems because of the relentless attacks on any kind of belief in the Bible. I have taught in two Christian schools and I challenged my students to respond to the modern secular mindset so they did not get sucked into it, along with most of our supposedly modern society.

Our belief in the Bible and in the G-d of the Bible used to be illegal in the early Roman Empire and believers were put to death for challenging a pagan view of the world. Modern paganism is in the process of taking over the world, but, as of yet, our belief in the G-d of the Bible has not yet become illegal. There are still some communist countries which suppress any religious faith, but once the iron curtain fell, Christians who had survived started coming out of the wood work.

I know that 2021 was a difficult year for many of us and that religious persecution is on the rise again, especially in Muslim countries where coming to faith in the Messiah, is punishable by death. I do not think things will get any easier in 2022 and even though there are thousands of missionaries and ministries leading millions of people into the faith, churches and synagogues are standing empty as our global society turns its back on the G-d of the Bible and our Messiah. Some would say that we are losing believers faster than we are gaining converts and I do not dispute this sad reality.

The 1800's and the early 1900's were perhaps the darkest chapters in the history of our faith. The Bible was supposedly disproved and many forms of religious morality were challenged and even overthrown. Today, in most formerly Christian countries, there are as many, if not more couples living common law, than who are married. It is not any better in Judaism.

Islam appears to be holding its own, but there are signs that when people escape from Islamic regimes, that they abandon traditional morality and spirituality as quickly as others who are joining the ranks of those who consider themselves modern. Many forms of modern immorality have just gone underground throughout the Muslim world. It is sad but true, that all major world religions are losing followers at an alarming rate.

What can we look forward to in 2022? The Bible says that before the return of the Messiah, conditions will bring back the darkness of the days of Noah, as global immorality grows exponentially. We are all part of a global economy where chain of supply issues negatively impact our lifestyle and where global pandemics appear to be on the rise.

However, the rise in natural disasters and the rumours of war are not really signs of our Messiah's return. They are just birth pangs and whenever they occur, some unwise believers proclaim that they are signs of the soon return of Yeshua. When they are proven wrong, our credibility with the society we are trying to reach out to is damaged.

So, there are still signs that have not yet happened and which have to be in place before our Messiah returns. Some people are even predicting that the L-rd will definitely return in 2022 and they even manipulate prophecies in the Bible to prove their point.

Well, what will B'nai Chayim look like as we wander through 2022? Currently, there is no legislation which prevents or even controls our right to assemble peacefully and to worship according to our conscience. So our shul will remain a law abiding, peaceful congregation which invites non believers, pre-believers and former believers to examine the claims we are making about G- and the truths of the Bible. This is the place we will continue to stand.

As soon as we can, we will return to celebrating the L-rd's Table every new moon and we will once again hold our regular noshes and onegs. But until it is safe to do so, we will abide by all the Covid restrictions and not put ourselves or others at risk. We will sit up and take notice if and when our real human rights are violated. We will not be duped by any version of any conspiracy theory, which is really a subtle form of antisemitism. Immigrants and Muslims are not taking over our country and police brutality is still virtually non existent.

B'nai Chayim will continue to be a pro-life community and we will never support the slaughter of babies in their mother's wombs. We will never support the LGBTxyz agenda, but will continue to welcome any members of that community who want our help in escaping from this painful form of sexual brokenness.

We will continue to take a firm stand against all forms of abuse and sexual violence and just for our own peace of mind, those convicted of sexual violence against children, will continue to be excluded from our fellowship. I say this is for our own peace of mind because, by law, these people are not allowed to come near any minor children. I believe that they have to stay at least 500 feet away and have to leave a gathering whenever minor children are present.

We will continue to uphold the biblical teaching that marriage is the only acceptable context for sexual relations of any kind. When a marriage breaks down, we will continue to support the right of either spouse to remarry and would discourage parents from making custody of their minor children a battlefield where the children suffer the most.

In 2022, we will continue to observe the festival cycle and the annual Torah reading schedule. We will continue to observe the Sabbath on the seventh day. We will continue to circumcise our male children and we will continue to promote biblical kosher as part of a messianic Jewish lifestyle. We will also continue to support our local Jewish community and will remain unwavering in our support for the nation of Israel.

We will also take a firm stance against racism of any kind and people of all colours will continue to welcome in our midst, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. Ladies will continue to be welcome to assume ministry roles in our midst and we will continue to encourage our young people to also take an active role in the life of our shul.

B'nai Chayim will never become a supporter of the flat earth theory and we affirm that there are no global secret societies, who are really in charge of the world as they hide in plain sight. We support peace globally and want to do our part in the fight against poverty and oppression of any kind. We support the basic freedoms and rights which are guaranteed by the Canadian Constitution.

We hold our right to freedom of religion very firmly. We do not believe that freedom of conscience gives us the right to believe whatever we want to believe and to live our lives according to our own personal morality. As a community, we hold the Bible to be the only source of religious truth and people who want to participate in the life of our community, must agree with our statement of faith and fundamental truths. We will live at peace with other members of our society who do not share our faith and spiritual morality, as long as our religious freedoms are not violated.

We will continue to reach out and encourage people to come to faith in the Messiah from Nazareth, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. We will continue to practise immersion (baptism) for adult believers and will continue to dedicate our babies and younger children.

We will continue to acknowledge the rich heritage we have in both the synagogue and the church and we reserve the right to maintain authentic Jewish space, without accepting either Talmudic authority or the stipulations of Christian and church traditions. We will never be just a watered down version of a traditional synagogue and we will never just be Gentiles pretending to be Jewish.

In 2022, our worship will be renewed and we will continue to support the ministry of the CMJC (Council of Messianic Jewish Congregations). Gentiles will continue to be welcomed into our midst as equal participants of the one new man and nothing will ever be done to diminish the Jewish nature of who we are. We are Jews and Gentiles, not Jews or Gentiles.

We would one day like to own our own building and while that is happening, we will continue to be good tenants who maintain a good relationship with our landlords and the other groups who meet in our building.

Gossip and back biting will continue to not be allowed along with any kind of anger and bitterness. We will work out all of our issues together in the bond of peace and will continue to recommend that contentious people move on because we maintain our unity and agreement as very high priorities.

We will support various outreach ministries, both locally and globally and we will hold up our leadership and our membership in prayer. The rabbi will continue to search for a replacement as he continues to minister to the best of his ability as he ages. We will continue to hold Yeshiva courses for leadership training and I look forward to the time when we can return to weekly Bible Study Yeshivas. We will encourage our membership to pray regularly, to study the Bible regularly, and to attend service regularly as we fellowship with one another regularly.