



For some, the Christmas narrative has become trite, something to be toyed with, but the story of the infant in the manger is not some fairy tale. It is the revelation of the King-Like-David, the Redeemer of Israel and the Nations.

BY DR. JIM SIBLEY

A moose in the manger?! My wife and I were vacationing in Colorado. In a gift shop, we saw a manger scene with the wise men, the shepherds, Joseph and Mary, and in the manger was a small moose (complete with antlers)! Some might think it cute, but no. The Christmas story has too often become trite, superficial, a cultural tradition, but who was really in the manger? Let's get beyond a moose in the manger!

Messiah, the Davidic king, was to be born in Bethlehem, as the prophet Micah had prophesied.[1] However, in thinking about the prophesied Prophet-like-Moses[2] there was some confusion about his birthplace and his relationship to the promised King. In John 7:40, some in the crowd around Jesus said, "This certainly is the Prophet." Twelve verses later, the Pharisees say, "Search and see that no prophet arises out of Galilee." In the oldest existing copy of this verse we read, "Search and see that the Prophet does not arise out of Galilee." [3] Both the crowds and the Pharisees are referring to the Prophet-like-Moses. In John 9, the man who had been born blind mocks the religious leaders because they do not know the origin of this "prophet," Jesus.[4]

Following his birth, his circumcision (eight days later), the arrival of the wise men, and his dedication at the temple when he was 40 days old, Matthew tells us that an angel warned Joseph that Herod would try to kill the infant. So, Joseph took Mary and Jesus and fled to Egypt. To Egypt? Yes, to the land of the pharaohs and the birthplace of Moses.



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When Herod realized that the wise men were not returning to supply him with more information about this new-born king, he ordered the execution of all male children two-years-old and younger in Bethlehem and the surrounding area. In this, he displayed the same attitude as Pharaoh, who ordered the male babies born to the Hebrews in Egypt to be killed. Ironically, this very same country became the refuge for this messianic Prophet-like-Moses.

When we understand how ruthlessly Herod dealt with any threat to his throne, it is hard to imagine he delayed for long in dealing with the news of the birth of a rival king in Bethlehem. The wise men likely came from Babylon, which was then part of the Roman Empire. It was 620 miles from Bethlehem, and camels travelled about 30 miles per day. So, the trip could have taken about three weeks. Herod's murderous edict was probably issued shortly after Jesus' dedication at the Temple.

Herod did not know how much time had elapsed between the birth of this "king of the Jews," and the arrival of the wise men, so he set his parameters generously, not just with reference to the ages of the children, but also geographically, for his edict included the surrounding area. Just as Moses was delivered from Pharaoh's slaughter of the innocents, so also was Jesus delivered from Herod's.

In speaking of the family's return from Egypt, Matthew quotes from Hosea 11:1: "When Israel was a youth I loved him, and out of Egypt did I call my son." [5] Many interpreters are perplexed by this quotation because it seems Matthew is not dealing with the text in a straightforward manner. God's son could be the people of Israel or the Messiah. Matthew is quoting Hosea, and Hosea is quoting from Numbers. In Numbers 23:22, Balaam says, "God brings them out of Egypt." The plural refers to the people of Israel, not an individual. This is the Exodus. However, in Numbers 24:8, he says, "God brings him out of Egypt." [6] Here, the singular refers to the Messianic Seed (24:7) who will defeat King Agag (or, better, Gog), [7] and whose kingdom will be exalted. This is clearly a reference to the Messiah. Both Hosea and Matthew understood that Messiah would be called out of Egypt. So, in Numbers we recognize that the Exodus is seen as a pattern for the literal sojourn of Messiah, who would also come out of Egypt.

Who's in the manger? The Messiah of Israel, the Son of God, who is both the Prophet-like-Moses and the King-like-David. We know who occupied the manger, but not everyone did then or now. The prophet Isaiah said, "An ox knows its owner, and a donkey its master's manger, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand" (Isa 1:3). Pray that the eyes of Israel are opened.

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## Footnotes

1. Micah 5:2.
2. Deut 18:15–19.
3. Emphasis added. Philip W. Comfort and David P. Barrett, eds., *The Complete Text of the Earliest New Testament Manuscripts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 406.
4. See John 9:17, 30.
5. Matt 2:15.
6. Emphasis has been added to both of the quotations above.
7. See Michael Rydelnik, *The Messianic Hope: Is the Hebrew Bible Really Messianic?* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2010), 38–39.