

Special Study

THE MESSIANIC HOPE

by Paul T. Butler

The Old Testament made many glorious promises in connection with the Messianic hope. Isaiah, chapters 40-66; Daniel 9:24-27; Micah 4-7; Zechariah 9-14.

When the Jews returned from their captivities (cir. 536-444 B.C.) it was with this hope in their hearts. They believed Jehovah would rule the land directly through a son of David, he would enforce the Law and promote the ritual religion. Some looked for Zerubbabel to fulfill this.

Time after time their fulfillment of this hope was frustrated by some foreign (Ptolemies and Seleucids and Romans) or some home-grown (Hasmonean and Herodian) oppression.

As the physical, earthly accomplishment of this hope became less evident (i.e., accomplishment through natural events), the anticipation increased that Jehovah would intervene in a great crisis of the cosmos (see Jn. 12:31 where Jesus uses that very phrase in Greek in connection with His death on the cross) and effect a deliverance of all the righteous Jews (*not* Hellenistic Jews) and God would suddenly, secretly almost, institute the messianic age.

This hope had never been so much alive, so vivid, nor its fulfillment so urgently awaited, as it was in the first centuries B.C. and A.D.—a time of sadness and deep, tormenting, national humiliation.

There was a body of literature that arose between the Old Testament and New Testament that expressed the Jewish ideas of the expected messianic age called the Jewish Apocrypha (apocalyptic in nature). The Sybilline Oracles, Book III (150 B.C.); the Book of Enoch (164 B.C.); The Psalms of Solomon (48 B.C.) are the most graphic. The Mishna, Talmud and Targums (rabbinic writings written after Christ but expressing traditions in oral form before Christ) are also valuable for determining the messianic ideas of first century people. They testify generally that the Messiah will:

- a. Attain for the people a literalized fulfillment of the promises of the Old Testament prophets (physical prosperity; physical conquest of enemies; physical restoration of Judaism).
- b. Defeat Jewish enemies and force them to serve the Jews.
- c. Restore all Jews to their "land" forever.
- d. Institute an era of Mosaic purity (as interpreted, of course, by the rabbis).

Josephus speaks of a number of men before and after Jesus who pretended to be the Messiah, obtained followers, fought Jewish enemies, and usually ended up slain in battle or executed. Josephus says "there was an ambiguous prophecy (probably referring to Dan. 9:24-27) in the Holy

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Scriptures which told the Jews that in those times a man of their nation would become the master of the world" Wars, 6:312.

Some believed in Jesus' day in a personal Messiah. This belief took *four* forms:

1. An Angel: As earthly powers continued to oppress the Jews with more intensity it was inevitable that the concept of the Messiah should become more and more transcendent. Many despaired of human deliverance and turned to hope in an angelic being coming from heaven with cosmic, supernatural power. See the Similitudes of Enoch (I Enoch, 164 B.C.) where the Son of Man is presented as a heavenly being with no prior human existence . . . his face has the appearance of a man and yet it is "full of graciousness like one of the holy angels." (46:1ff.).

Remember the devil's attempt to get Jesus to show off some supernatural, angelic power . . . "if he was the Son of God. . . ." Matt. 4:5, 6.

2. A Prophet: Some interpreted Malachi 3:1ff. and 4:5 as referring to the Messiah himself rather than the forerunner—thus he would be a prophet like Elijah. Many of the disciples of John the Baptist refused to abandon their belief in him as the true Messiah and perpetuated into the 2nd century A.D. a sect which held up John the Baptist messiahship in opposition to Jesus (The Mandaens; see Ency. Britt. Vol. 4 and 10).

The Samaritans were expecting a prophetic messiah, Jn. 4:19-26. Many of the Jews thought this also, Jn. 7:40; Mt. 16:14; Jn. 1:21; I Macc. 4:46; etc. Jn. 6:14.

3. A Priest: In later interbiblical history there appears the idea of a messianic priest. When the offices of High Priest and prince of Israel were combined in Simon the Maccabean, impetus was given to the development of such hope. But as the High Priesthood became more and more secularized and corrupted, this view seems to have found less and less acceptance. See the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs (110 B.C.).

4. A King: By far the most popular view was a Messiah-warrior-king. He would appear as a political champion. Jews from all over the world would rally to his side, sweep the pagans from Palestine, subdue the world, plunder its riches, kill all idolaters and make proselytes and servants of the rest.

See this view in all the earliest Jewish apocryphal writings, and, Mt. 21:9, 15 (cf. Zech. 9:9, 10); Mt. 22:42; Mk. 13:35;

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Lk. 20:41; Jn. 6:15; I Macc. 2:57; Psalms of Solomon 17:5, 23, etc.

Even this popular view expected the Messiah's origin to be shrouded in mystery (Jn. 7:21ff.) and His mission to be one of cosmic supernaturalisms, Mt. 12:38; Jn. 7:31.

Remember the temptation of the devil to make Jesus an earthly king.

There were many who arose pretending to be the Messiah. *Theudas* had 400 followers but he was slain (Acts 5:36; Josephus, *Antiq.* 20:97ff.). *Judas the Galilean* was also slain (Acts 5:37; Josephus, *Antiq.* 18:23). *An Egyptian* gained about 30,000 followers, (Josephus, *Wars* 2:261ff. and Acts 21:37, 38). Menachem bar-Judah and Simeon bar-Giora (*Wars*, 2:17:8; *Wars*, 4:9:7 respectively), and many others after Jesus were hoped-for messiahs.

There was great expectancy in the first century A.D., but there was also great confusion and misunderstanding concerning the Messiah and His kingdom. Jesus' most frustrating ministry was to try to *convert*, literally change, the confusion, materialism and patriotic provincialism of the messianic people into what it was really intended to be by God as predicted in the Old Testament prophets.

WHAT DID THE PEOPLE OF JESUS' DAY THINK OF THE MESSIAH? (Our *best* sources are the Gospel records themselves.)

1. Mt. 2:4-6: He would be born in Bethlehem—the scholars knew this much.
2. Lk. 2:25, 38: Some were “looking for” the “consolation” and “redemption” of Israel and Jerusalem.
3. Lk. 3:15-18: Many thought John the Baptist might be the Messiah.
4. Mt. 4:1-11; Mk. 1:12-13; Lk. 4:1-13: Jesus' temptations indicate the popular messianic concept.
5. Jn. 1:19-28: Jewish leaders knew a connection between Elijah and Messiah and thought John the Baptist might be one or the other.
6. Jn. 1:45-51: Nathanael did not believe the Messiah would come from Nazareth.
7. Jn. 4:5-26: Samaritans believed when Messiah came he would settle religious disputes.
8. Lk. 4:16-31: Jews of Galilee did not accept Messianic prophecies of Isaiah 61 being made available to Gentiles.
9. Mt. 9:1-8; Mk. 2:1-12; Lk. 5:17-26: Apparently the Jews did not think their Messiah would be God incarnate and able to forgive men's sins.

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10. Mt. 9:10-14; Mk. 2:15-22; Lk. 5:29-39: Apparently Jewish rabbis did not think their Messiah would associate with publicans and sinners.
11. Mt. 11:2-19; Lk. 7:18-35: Messiah is called "The Expected One" (as in Similitudes of Enoch) by John the Baptist who apparently expected Him to be more militant than Jesus was.
12. Mt. 12:38: Jewish rulers insisted Jesus must show a "sign" to prove his messiahship.
13. Mt. 13:54-58; Mk. 6:1-6: People could not imagine Jesus as the Messiah because they knew his origins.
14. Jn. 6:14, 15: Messiah would be "The Prophet" and he must be crowned King.
15. Jn. 6:22-59: Jesus perceived the people wanted a bread-and-fish Messiah—one who would do a "work" to prove he was the Messiah.
16. Jn. 6:66-71: Jesus' disciples thought of the Messiah as "The Holy One of God."
17. Mt. 16:13-16; Mk. 8:27-29; Lk. 9:17-20: Disciples show that the people thought the Messiah would be Elijah, Jeremiah or one of the prophets, perhaps. Peter would not believe the Messiah was to die Mt. 16:21-23; Mk. 8:31-33.
18. Mt. 17:10-13; Mk. 9:11-13: Elijah's coming must precede that of the Son of Man—a literal Elijah, perhaps.
19. Mt. 18:1-5; Mk. 9:33-37; Lk. 9:46-48: Disciples thought of messianic kingdom in terms of power struggles.
20. Jn. 7:2-9: Jesus' brothers expected him to prove his messiahship in Jerusalem in some public, spectacular, carnal demonstration of power.
21. Lk. 9:51-56: Disciples expect Messiah to punish those who reject him by fire from heaven.
22. Jn. 7:27: No one is supposed to know where the Messiah comes from—he is to appear suddenly—but he would perform enough signs for everyone to know him—not just the rulers.
23. Jn. 7:35: Messiah was not expected to go among the Jewish dispersion.
24. Jn. 7:40-43: Confusion about Messiah. Some thought he would be The Prophet from Galilee, others believed from Bethlehem.
25. Jn. 8:52, 53: Jewish scholars did not expect the Messiah to be an "eternal" personage.
26. Lk. 11:16: Messiah must show a sign from "heaven."

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27. Lk. 12:54-59: Jews could not read the "signs" that their Messiah was to come in judgment upon their nation.
28. Jn. 9:13-34: Messiah must keep Sabbath according to their traditions.
29. Lk. 14:15: Jews were looking for a time of "eating" of banquets in the messianic kingdom as repayment for their troubles (cf. Isa. 25:6ff.).
30. Mt. 20:20-28; Mk. 10:35-45: Mother of the sons of Zebedee understood the messianic kingdom to be one of position and power.
31. Jn. 12:20-36: Some believed the Messiah was to remain forever and not die.
32. Mt. 22:41-46; Mk. 12:35-37; Lk. 20:41-44: Apparently the Jews did not conceive of the Son of David as also *David's Lord!*
33. Mt. 23:37— Mk. 24:1-4; Mk. 13:1-4; Lk. 21:5-7: Apparently the people did not think of the coming of the Messiah as a judgment upon Jerusalem and the nation. They did think of his coming as the end of the world and Jesus had to correct this view.
34. Mt. 26:51, 52; Jn. 18:10, 11: Peter thought of messianic kingdom as needing to be defended with swords.
35. Mt. 26:57-68; Mk. 14:53-65: Apparently the High Priest did not conceive of the Messiah or anyone else calling himself "God."
36. Jn. 18:28-38: Pilate understood Jesus to be an idealist—not an earthly king.
37. Lk. 23:51: Joseph of Arimathea "was looking for" the kingdom of God.
38. Lk. 24:13-32: Disciples despondent when Jesus did not "redeem" Israel according to their own hopes. Jesus, however, *expected* them to have a *spiritual* view of the Old Testament messianic promises and *rebuked* them for not having it.
39. Acts 1:6: Even after the resurrection the disciples had a somewhat earthly view of the kingdom of God.
40. Acts 6:8-15: The Jews would not accept any claimant to the messianic throne who would "change the customs which Moses delivered."

The humanistic, materialistic traditions of the Pharisees and Sadducees and others (Essenes, et al), kept the common people confused about the Messiah and his kingdom. Jesus actually did not convert a single person fully to His teaching of the Messiah and the kingdom. It was only after His death and resurrection and the Day of Pentecost that some of the Jews began to see it correctly (including His disciples). And even then, it took

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some years before most of the Jews accepted the idea that the messianic kingdom was to be available to the Gentiles on the same basis as to Jews.

But the four gospel accounts testify to this:

JESUS OF NAZARETH, SON OF MARY ACCORDING TO THE FLESH, IS INDEED THE ANOINTED (MESSIAH) OF JEHOVAH—THE PROPHET, PRIEST AND KING PREDICTED BY THE OLD TESTAMENT. AND HE IS THE MESSIAH OF ALL THE NATIONS!

For a résumé of modern Jewish messianic theology, see *Isaiah, Vol. III*, by Paul T. Butler, pub. College Press, Joplin, Mo., pgs. 277-280 and 415-418.