

SPECIAL STUDIES

THE KIND OF MESSIAH GOD HAS IN MIND ACCORDING TO MATTHEW

From the very first page of his Gospel Matthew flashes before his readers a series of radical claims for Jesus that must be taken seriously and examined carefully. Before the reader has completed two chapters, Matthew has already introduced Jesus of Nazareth as:

1. The descendant of the principal heirs of the promises God gave to the Hebrew people, Abraham and David (1:1-17). Yet, He descends from at least three Gentile ancestresses.
2. He comes from God by the activity of the Holy Spirit (1:18-25).
3. Rather than liberate His people from their national enemies, He comes to "save them from their sins" (1:21). He is named "Jesus" ("Javeh saves") and "Immanuel, God with us" (1:23).
4. Though He is the "ruler who shall pastor God's people" (2:6), He is the object of the indifference of the clergy and the persecution of the powerful (2:1-23).
5. The very inauspicious circumstances surrounding His birth, combined with the disgusting nickname, "the Nazarene" (1:23), point to a suffering Messiah from the very beginning.
6. John the Baptist presented Jesus as the Judge who would execute the justice of God and who alone was qualified to immerse men in the Holy Spirit (3:1-12)! Yet, Matthew's Messiah appeared for the first time in public as just another common man among the sinners who presented themselves to John for baptism (3:13-15). Despite His humanness, He is God's beloved Son and anointed with the Holy Spirit (3:16, 17).
7. The Messiah relived the same trials of His own people, proving Himself faithful to God as His authentic "Son," responding to the temptations, not as would an angel, but, rather, with the attitude of a true human being who is a worshiper of God (4:1-11).
8. The Messiah is concerned with the enlightenment of the benighted among the Gentiles (4:12-17; Isa. 9:1f.).
9. As the "new Moses" Jesus is not merely a great Lawgiver who repeats what God told him, but actually rises above the Mosaic Law to say what He personally requires (5:21, 27, 32, 34, 39, 44). Further, He is a Messiah who will "fulfil the Law," bringing it to its proper completion (5:17).
10. Jesus is a Messiah who has time for, and is powerfully competent to help, the impure nature's most violent forces (8:23-27),

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- demoniacs (8:28—9:1), paralyzed sinners (9:1-8), the outcasts of society (9:9-13), the pious but ignorant (9:14-17), and many others (9:18-34). Despite the multiplicity of appeals for His help, He regards people with genuine compassion (9:36-38), as an abandoned flock over which God assumes the care. (Cf. Ezek. 34.)
11. Jesus presents Himself as Teacher and Master and Lord of the House. He expects His followers to suffer for His sake, and assumes upon Himself the role of Lawyer, or Advocate, at the Judgment of God. (Cf. 10:18, 22, 32, 33, 37-39.)
 12. Even the mighty miracles of Jesus do not force people to believe in Him (11:2-24). They merely push His hearers into two positions: belief or unbelief. John the Baptist himself hesitated in the presence of contradictions in his own mind, the works notwithstanding (11:2-19). The Galileans did not understand their need to submit to Jesus by repenting (11:20-24). "The wise and understanding" could not grasp the wisdom and source of His work (11:25-27). He is the kind of Messianic King that is comprehensible only to the man who is ready to do the will of the Father (12:50).
 13. In contrast to the austere John the Baptist, Jesus is a Messiah whose life is full of the fulness of the human life (11:16-19). Notwithstanding the different life-style of the two messengers of God, the results demonstrated that God had acted with wisdom in sending them precisely as He did.
 14. Jesus reveals everything willingly to those who submit to His instruction and commit themselves to learn from Him (11:28-30). This intention involves growth of character, not automatic righteousness. Still, He is gentle and lowly in heart, and able to move mercifully among contrasting levels of society and help people.
 15. Jesus is the kind of Messiah who does not overwhelm His opposition with a brilliant burst of supernatural power, forcing their belief and submission. Rather, He generously meets their questions, doubts, objections and cavils with answers sufficient to convince the common, honest listener (12:1-50). In fact, when the opposition demands the supernatural "fireworks," He who could call down 10,000 angels gave a common, perfectly acceptable sign. (Cf. 16:1-4.)
 16. Jesus is the Servant of Javeh (12:18-21 = Isaiah 42:1-4).
 17. Jesus recognizes no claims of blood or kinship of the flesh, only moral ties cemented by obedience to the will of God (12:46-50).
 18. Jesus respects the human freedom of His own townspeople at

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- Nazareth, however severely He must have been tempted to do many mighty works there "just to show 'em!" (13:54-58).
19. Even in His own ministry, Jesus respected His own time schedules, not only bending every lesson to prepare for the cross in His life, but avoiding unnecessary conflicts that would tend to abbreviate the time available to teach His disciples (Matt. 14:13a; cf. 4:12; 15:21; 16:4b).
 20. He is realistic about the overconfidence of His followers, since He knows that they can be influenced by popular leaders and parties' skepticism about Him (16:5-12). However, He has no fear to entrust the mission of the Church-Kingdom to men dedicated to Him (16:13-20).
 21. He does not swerve from the predetermined plan of God, notwithstanding the most strenuous efforts of earthly friends to dissuade Him from being the type of Messiah God has in mind (16:21-28).
 22. He will be the glorious Judge of every man, repaying each according to what he has done, thus fulfilling in full all that John the Baptist predicted of Him (16:27).
 23. He is the glorious Messiah foreshadowed by the Law and the prophets, to whom all must listen and obey (17:1-8). However, He would suffer the same fate as John (17:10-13).
 24. Despite His real exemption from paying tribute to God's temple, because He is God's Son, still He meekly pays it, in order not to scandalize those who would not understand His standpoint and miss His message because of it (17:24-27).
 25. He is the kind of Messiah who refuses to recognize artificial claims to honor and greatness. Rather, His "rule of greatness" is the degree to which anyone renders service to the weakest, smallest, least important in the Kingdom (18:1-35).
 26. He is the kind of Messiah that refuses earthly power-structures as a means of ruling over men, choosing rather the path of service as the ransom for man (20:20-28).
 27. Despite His dissimilarity to everything Messianic in the popular mind, Jesus really is God's kind of Messianic King (21:1-17).
 28. He is the kind of Messiah that, despite His autonomous miracle-working power and God-given authority, does not undervalue nor forget the importance of His lesser servants' ministry (21:23-27).
 29. He is really the "chief corner stone" God planned to use (21:42), really God's Son (21:33-43).

30. No mental image of the Messiah is adequate that sees His Messiahship as having only earthly regality, such as that of a "Son of David" reigning on a material throne in Jerusalem. In fact, the true Messiah, as David himself admits, must be thought of as the "Lord of David" (22:41-46).
31. Jesus is objective, willing to recognize truth wherever it is found and correctly taught, even if it is a Pharisee that teaches it (23:2, 3).
32. Jesus is Israel's truest Patriot (23:37-39), but true Prophet (24:1-28) and "Son of man" (24:29-44; cf. Dan. 7:13, 14).
33. He is the glorious Messianic King before whom all nations will be tried, whose judgment affects the eternal destiny of each one, and whose judgment is based upon how each one treated "the least of these my brethren" (25:31-46).
34. He is not a helpless victim going innocently to an unexpected, tragic death, but "the Son of man" fully self-possessed moving majestically and consciously toward victory. He willingly pours out His blood to establish a new covenant and provide forgiveness (26:1, 2, 12, 13, 26-29).
35. Jesus is not the kind of Messiah that would abandon His vacillating disciples, even though He proved to them that He knew what their reaction would be to His death, despite their good intentions (26:30-35).
36. Jesus is a fully human Messiah who could really suffer, flinching at the thought of death (26:36-46).
37. Though under arrest and abandoned by His Apostles and betrayed by His Apostle, He remains the real Master of the situation (26:47-56).
38. He is definitely innocent of any guilt, according to His betrayer-Apostle (27:4), the wife of Pilate (27:19) and Pilate himself (27:18, 24).
39. He is self-controlled despite temptations to return accusations and insults (26:62, 63, 67, 68; 27:12-14, 27-31, 40, 43).
40. Jesus is proven to be the Messiah of God even in His death, as shown by His fulfilment of the ancient prophecies (27:32-48). His death signalled the end of an era and the beginning of another (27:51-54).
41. Jesus is the victorious Christ to whom universal authority has been granted and who orders His people to participate in His personal mission to teach the entire world (28:18-20). His presence with His people until the end of time guarantees His concrete interest in their affairs and His care for them.