

Draft 2  
1/26/09

~~Which Messiah?~~  
Chapter 5

In the Tanach (The Hebrew Bible), sometimes call "The Old Testament" we are informed that those appointed by God to lead His people are officially anointed with holy oil by the reigning prophet (God's representatives). The person thus anointed is "the anointed one" or Messiah, in Hebrew ~~Mesiah~~ <sup>Mesiah</sup>. Among God's chosen leaders are the priests and the Kings. Technically each person so anointed is a Messiah.

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Wash

Even a person outside of the Israelite community can be chosen by God to lead Israel. Thus in the Book of Isaiah (chap. 45:1), we are told that Cyrus, King of Persia, is chosen to lead those Israelites living in captivity in Babylonia and Assyria <sup>to freedom</sup>. Cyrus is named by God, Isaiah tells us, to be "His anointed one", His Messiah.

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To freedom

This meaning of the Hebrew word for the Messiah changed as the centuries passed. After Babylonia conquered Judea (the Southern part of the divided Israelite kingdom) and took captive a significant part of the Judean leadership, the Prophets began to speak of an ideal King who would be installed as King (Messiah) when the Judean nation regained its freedom and the former captives, or their decedents, were restored to their own land.

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The Prophet Jeremiah proclaims in the name of God, "See, a time is coming when I will raise up a true branch of David's line. He shall reign as King and shall prosper, and he shall do what is just and right in the land... and this is the name by which he shall be called, 'The Lord is our vindicator'".

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This is especially true of the Second Isaiah (chap. 40-ff) sometimes identified as the Prophet of the Exile. Isaiah clearly speaks of Israel, the people, as God's chosen servant which had become "...the despised being, the abhorred nation" which was persecuted and mistreated by its conquerors (chap. 49:7), (chap. 53: 7-11).

note to Jody - Capital C for Chap.)



by alien nations

At first, the Prophets justify the military conquest of both Northern and Southern Kingdoms by proclaiming that the God of Israel had permitted this to happen because the Israelites had not followed God's law. The Israelite religious leaders could not believe that foreign military powers could conquer the Israelite nations if <sup>the latter</sup> those nations had deserved God's favor. <sup>They</sup> since it was believed that the God of the Israelite nations was more powerful than other national Gods. They believed that international events were under the control of the Israelite God, and other nations were merely the Israelite God's <sup>fools</sup> fools or pawns. t

When the conquering nations (Babylonia and Assyria) seemed to be overly cruel to God's chosen people, God pardoned his people for their waywardness and punished the former conquerors. The Prophet Jeremiah explicitly proclaimed (in God's name), "... I am ever a father to Israel, Ephraim is my firstborn", (chap. 31:9). c

Jeremiah proclaims in God's name "See, a time is coming-declares the Lord-when I will make a new covenant with the House of Israel and the House of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers, when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, a covenant which they broke, so that I rejected them-declares the Lord. But such is the covenant I will make with the House of Israel after these days-declares the Lord: I will put My Teaching into their inmost being and inscribe it upon their hearts. Then I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No longer will they need to teach one another and say to one another, "Heed the Lord"; for all of them, from the least of them to the greatest, shall heed Me-declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquities, And remember their sins no more. (chap. 31: 31-34). "

<sup>author</sup> The author of the New Testament goes to some length to establish a strong link between Jesus and King David.<sup>1</sup> No doubt this is to demonstrate that Jesus is the ideal future king of whom several of the Literary Prophets speak. Thus, he is claimed to be not only a King (Meshiach, anointed one) but also The Messiah, The ideal King who will overthrow the foreign power (Rome, in the current situation) and establish the reign of righteousness. The Romans understood Jesus to be just such a claimant to the throne of an independent Judea, for they wrote on his cross, we are told, the four Roman letters INRI. Each of these letters stood for a Roman word: s

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 1:1-16 and Luke 3:23-24



(I=Jesus, N= Nazareth, R= Rex-King, I= Judea). The Roman soldiers further mocked Jesus by giving him a purple robe. Purple is the royal color, and the soldiers gave him a crown (of thorns). All of these factors indicate that the Romans thought of Jesus as a revolutionary.

Jesus, however, may have thought of himself not as the Messiah ben David (a descendent of David) but as someone else.

Jesus engages in a word battle with those Jewish leaders who think he is presenting himself as the Messiah ben David. He seems to want to prove that cannot be true. How does he think of himself?

Some scholars think Jesus and his followers thought of him as Messiah ben Joseph, sometimes identified as Messiah ben Ephraim. Ephraim was the son of Joseph. The belief that there were two Messiahs <sup>was</sup> held by certain groups in Judaism as evidenced in the literature known <sup>to</sup> as "The Dead Sea Scrolls". The Israelite authors of these scrolls indicate that their group believed in two messiahs, each of whom had a specific function. Certain of the apocryphal books<sup>2</sup> also refer to the Messiah ben Joseph. This messiah was to come before the Messiah ben David, and he was to suffer a tragic death in battle.

We first learn of the tradition of the Messiah ben Joseph and his death in the Babylonian Talmud (Sukkah 52a).

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In a seventh-century apocalyptic text known as Sefer Zerubabel, we are told that the Messiah ben Joseph was killed by the wicked Armilus but was resurrected by the Messiah ben David and the Prophet Elijah. This reference seems to be a post Christian development, but we have a pre-Christian reference to the Messiah ben Joseph in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in the newly discovered stone text which is similar to the Dead Sea writings. This stone is identified as "Gabriel's Revelation"<sup>3</sup> and seems to speak of the Messiah ben Joseph.

<sup>2</sup> The books not accepted in the official canon of the Hebrew Bible <sup>many of these books</sup> but are preserved in the Catholic Bible or elsewhere.

<sup>3</sup> See the article, "The Messiah Son of Joseph" pp. 58ff in "The Biblical Archaeology Review", September/October 2008, Vol. 34, number 5.



In the Apocryphal work "Joseph and Aseneth"<sup>4</sup> written between 100BCE and 115 C.E., Joseph is described as "Son of God" (6::35, 18:13. Joseph is also called "God's firstborn son" (18:11, 21:4, 23:10). *See also Jeremiah 31:9.*

In "The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs"<sup>5</sup> from the second Temple period, the Testament of Benjamin connects Joseph and the figure of the suffering servant (chap. 52-83). This seems to demonstrate that there are sources from the Second Temple period that are already referring to Joseph as having a special relationship to the developing messianic thought. C

In the Midrash "Pesikta Rabati",<sup>6</sup> there is reference to a messiah Ephraim (son of Joseph) who is asked to take upon himself the suffering of all of Israel. There is apparently a scholarly difference of opinion as to whether these writings precede or follow the New Testament.

Jesus is called the "Son of David" many times in the New Testament (Mark 10:46, 11:10; Matthew 9:27, 12:23, 15:22, 20:30, 21:9, Luke 18:38). The Nativity Story, (Matthew 2:1-18; Luke 2: 1-20) seems designed to make clear that Jesus is the "Son of David".

In the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus seems to reject the idea that he is the messiah, Son of David (Mark 12:35-37; Matthew 22:41-46; Luke 20:41-44). He employs the Psalm 110 to prove that he could not be the son of David. Perhaps Jesus reacts in this way to suggest that he is following a different kind of messiah model, the model of the Messiah ben Ephraim (the son of Joseph). Of course, the Messiah ben Joseph is involved with suffering and death.

In his seminal book, "The Messiah Idea in Jewish History",<sup>7</sup> Julius H. Greenstone shows that the concept of two messiahs, Messiah ben Joseph (who leads Israel in battles against its enemies and is himself killed), and Messiah ben David, who is to conquer the foreign overlord and lead Israel to freedom and righteousness.

<sup>4</sup> Same article as above. *ASAD*

<sup>5</sup> Same article as above. *ASAD*

<sup>6</sup> Same article as above. *ASAD*

<sup>7</sup> Published 1906 and reprinted in 1943 and 1948 by The Jewish Publication Society of America. *ibid*



*we do not have clarity.*

In the light of the evidence, both in the New Testament and in extra-testamentary information, we have to conclude that the matter of the messiahship is unclear. The New Testament may or may not conclude that Jesus is the triumphant Messiah, son of David.

In any event, the Jewish understanding of the latter as described by the Israelite Prophets requires a number of factors not fulfilled by Jesus. These are: 1) The ideal King was to overthrow the foreign power (Rome). This did not happen. 2) A long period of peace was to be introduced. 3) The ideal King would rule in justice. 4) The two divided nations, Israel to the north and Judea to the south, will be united, and the suffering of the combined nations would cease. Few of these provisions occurred.

If the New Testament does not make clear which messiah Jesus and his followers think he is, the Romans are clear in their thinking that Jesus is a claimant to the throne of an independent Judea. The High Priest, as described in the New Testament, agrees with the Romans. If the people were given a voice in the situation, it would be extremely odd if they would not hope that Jesus was, indeed, the Messiah ben David, for that would mean the overthrowing of the cruel Roman master! !

Down through the centuries to come, the people were attracted to every claimant to be the Messiah ben David. Each pretender would attract a huge following, sometimes to the great hurt of the people.<sup>8</sup> There is no reason to believe that the people would not follow Jesus also, but those in power, i.e., the Romans and their appointee, the High Priest, would not be friendly to Jesus. Of course, if Jesus claimed to be divine, the Priests would have another reason to be alarmed.

At another point in the New Testament, the text suggests that Jesus thought of himself as the disciple of John the Baptist or as something more than that. We are told that Jesus was baptized by John and sometime later engaged in a discussion with his own disciples as to whom they thought he (Jesus) was. They said, "Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah, or one of the prophets".

The text then tells us that Jesus tries to get a more specific answer. He says, "But who say you that I am?" Simon Peter answered and said, "Thou

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<sup>8</sup> See "The Messiah Idea In Jewish History" Julius Greenstone, especially page 110



art the Christ, the son of the living God". The story continues, "And Jesus blessed him... and promised to deliver unto him, 'the keys of the Kingdom of heaven'". Then Jesus charges his disciples to "tell no man that he was the Christ".

A few days later, the disciples suggested that the Scribes taught that Elijah is expected to come first. To this, Jesus replied that Elijah had already appeared, "and they knew him not...". "Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist".

All of this seems simple and clear. Jesus is making the case that he fulfills all the requirements for the Messiah as expressed in the Talmud and as generally understood by the Jewish authorities.<sup>9</sup>

Nonetheless, he believes that he is not the Messiah ben David, but someone higher than that... This someone is identified in Psalm 110, V.1 as "Lord"<sup>#10</sup>. According to the New Testament interpretation, Jewish scholars read their native text differently.

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<sup>9</sup> See Greenstone, "Messiah Idea..." pp. 187-88 where Maimonides place the requirements for the Messiah under 10 points.

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Psalm 110, like the other Psalms, are attributed, in the Jewish tradition, to King David. Many of the Psalms are of a general nature and may be recited as a personal prayer <sup>by any</sup>. See, for example, the widely used 23rd Psalm ("The Lord is my shepherd..."). On the other hand, many of the Psalms seem to be rendered by a King concerned about problems attending his reign. The 23rd Psalm can also be rendered in this mood. In the author's doctoral thesis, he analyzes the 23rd Psalm from just this viewpoint. <sup>#11</sup>

In the Tanakh, The Holy Scriptures, <sup>#12</sup> Psalm 110 seems clearly to be written for David but not by David. David is called "my lord" but the latter word is distinguished from the word "lord" which is reserved for God. David and his rule are favored by God, and the Psalm that asserts that David and his descendants will rule forever "You are a priest forever, a rightful King in my decree" (v. 4).

note 11: The meaning of the Hebrew word "TOV" in the Scripture, found in the library of the Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion, New York, N.Y.

note 12: Published by the Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia, 1985



The Hebrew script uses different words to describe God and David. God is יהוה; the singular word for the name of the Hebrew God. Since the name of יהוה is not to be spoken except by the High Priest on the holiest of days, it was given the vowels of the word for "master". The four letter word for the Hebrew name of God was then expressed "by some as 'Sehovah'". In Hebrew the word "master" (Ah-do-nai) but this is not God's name which is related to the word "Sehovah".

So that it may be used in common speech

name of God  
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"Sehovah". In Hebrew the word "master" (Ah-do-nai) but this is not God's name which is related to the word "Sehovah". At any rate, there are two different Hebrew words in Psalm 110:1.

A proper reading might be: יהוה said to my (one author of the Psalm) master יהוה. There are not two words for "Lord" or God. Two divine beings are not involved. On the basis of the Hebrew words and on the basis of the theme of the Psalm, namely God's reassurance of David that his reign will be an enduring one, we can readily understand the simple wording of the Psalm. To read "Lord" for יהוה and יהוה is not to understand the profound difference. (See Ex 3:15)

1, In the incident involving Moses and the burning bush, Moses asks to know God's name and is rebuffed. His reluctance to reveal the specific name of the God of the Hebrews is to be understood in terms of the Egyptian use of a God's name by a priest to compel him/her to do

Compel  
the high priest



~~The~~ Over time, traditional Jews would only say "Ah-do-shem" for God's specific name or simply "Ha-shem, The Name".

In the most recent translation of the Jewish scripture, the committee simply distinguished from יהוה and יהו by calling the former "Lord" (capital YHWH) and the latter lord (small y). This rendering also distinguishes between the divine and the human.