



# MISHKAN

■ A FORUM ON THE GOSPEL AND THE JEWISH PEOPLE ■ *Issue 70/ 2012*



*Messianic  
Prophecy*

# **MISHKAN**

**A Forum on the Gospel and the Jewish People**

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**Editor: Jim R. Sibley**

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**Mishkan** is a quarterly journal dedicated to biblical and theological thinking on issues related to Jewish Evangelism, Hebrew-Christian/Messianic-Jewish identity, and Jewish-Christian relations.

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**Mishkan's** editorial policy is openly evangelical, committed to the New Testament proclamation that the gospel of salvation through faith in Jesus (Yeshua) the Messiah is "to the Jew first."

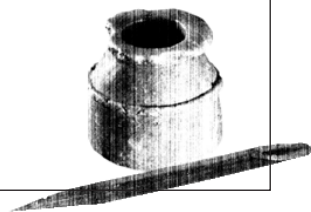
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**Mishkan** is the Hebrew word for *tabernacle* or *dwelling place* (John 1:14).

A WORD FROM THE EDITOR

# Messianic Prophecy

By **Jim R. Sibley**



*Mishkan* is a forum in which topics relevant to Christians who are interested in Israel and the gospel are discussed in an atmosphere of mutual respect. In this issue, a controversy over the interpretation of messianic prophecy is highlighted. Most of the articles argue for a more cautious and indirect application of the predictions in the Hebrew Scriptures to Yeshua, our Messiah. Personally, I believe in a more direct application of messianic prophecy, but I am blessed by reading these thought-provoking articles by my colleagues. I conducted an interview with Michael Rydelnik, and it is published in this issue, along with the other articles. Potential authors' schedules and the vicissitudes of circumstances have prevented a more balanced presentation, but our hope is that you will be provoked to give more serious thought to the use of messianic prophecy in your encounters with Jewish friends who have yet to come to know Him of whom "the prophets have spoken" (Luke 24:25). With this, we can all agree wholeheartedly!

In addition to our thematic articles, Michael Darby takes us back in time to the "Origins of the Modern Hebrew Christian Movement in Britain."

My deepest gratitude is due Dr. Richard Robinson, who has been the managing editor for this issue. He has many other responsibilities and demands on his time, but has given unstintingly, not only as our book review editor, but also to take responsibility for this issue.



# An Introduction to Messianic Prophecy

by **Richard A. Robinson**

Few things have been as central to the work of Jewish missions as the use of messianic prophecy. With its basis in the Hebrew Scriptures and its constant employment by Jesus and the apostles, messianic prophecy has been a linchpin of apologetics to Jewish non-believers and discipleship for those who have come to faith.

It is arguable that, among believers in Jesus, messianic prophecy ranks high on the list of controversial topics. Are the prophecies a matter of simple predictions? Or are they often more subtle, involving typology or historical patterns? Does the New Testament employ our familiar historical-grammatical method when it quotes the Tanakh, or is it using other methods found in Second Temple Judaism? Can we replicate the exegesis of the apostles or not? Is messianic prophecy always an indispensable part of proclaiming the gospel to Jewish people, even among today's increasingly secular Jewish community? And surely there are many more questions as well.

This edition of *Mishkan* seeks to address a few of these issues through articles that, it is hoped, will stimulate further reflection and discussion. To situate the articles, there follows a brief introduction to each. This is in no way an attempt to be comprehensive, but simply to suggest some contours of where the current discussion lies. Perhaps in the future, a more comprehensive conversation can occur.

Andrew Barron opens this issue by looking at what should happen even before we speak to someone about messianic prophecy. Barron believes that the way messianic prophecy has been used in the past has been overly characterized by triumphalism or by "power argumentation." In contrast, any apologetic, including the use of messianic prophecy, must be characterized by vulnerability and the recognition of ambiguity, and must originate from a position of marginality. Those who are familiar with discussions of modernism vis-à-vis postmodernism may find some similarities to those categories. Here, though, Barron uses a sociological approach as he warns against "rival certainties" in approaching the topic of messianic prophecy.



Utilizing messianic prophecy is not only a matter of our stance of vulnerability, as explicated in Barron's article. Nor is it only a matter of replacing "information" with "story." Different subsets of the Jewish community have their own stories or metanarratives, with their own beginnings, endings, and high points.

In the second article, I make some suggestions for how we can speak the gospel into these various stories, with a particular emphasis on how messianic prophecies can naturally address the concerns of these metanarratives. In this way we can move beyond the traditional "standard" approach of prophecies/fulfillments to a more holistic proclamation.

Having looked at the prerequisites of believers as communicators, and having surveyed several contemporary narratives in the Jewish community (our audience), we next turn to that which forms the basis of our message (the Scripture). In an article adapted from the introduction to a forthcoming book, Herbert Bateman claims that the approach of Jesus the Messiah is threefold and is specifically set in contrast with views that see Old Testament messianic prophecy as uniformly and directly predictive of Jesus. Instead, the book intends to develop the messianic promises first from within the Old Testament canon itself, second by reference to Second Temple period understandings, and last by the New Testament revelation of Jesus as that promised Messiah, a revelation organically related to the first two categories. In this regard, compare Barron's use of the word "ambiguity" with such phrases in this article as "messianic puzzle," "our blurred vision," "more clarity to what, initially, was often only implicitly visible"; perhaps something similar is being said in sociological and in exegetical categories, respectively. *Jesus the Messiah* is scheduled to be released in August 2012.

Following "A Conversation with Michael Rydelnik" (see "A Word from the Editor"), the next article also illustrates an approach to messianic prophecy that differs from the approach of the book *Jesus the Messiah* (presented in the article by Bateman), and indeed from those of the first two authors. Seth Postell employs an approach utilized by John Sailhamer and reflected in Postell's own book *Adam as Israel: Genesis 1–3 as the Introduction to the Torah and Tanakh* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2011). In this approach, the purpose of the Torah is to foreshadow Israel's inability to keep the Sinai covenant while pointing to a future king who will fulfill the mandate God originally gave to Adam. Though the Torah is frequently identified as Israel's instruction manual for life under the Sinai covenant, Postell argues that the Torah's storyline looks beyond Sinai to the messianic hope in the last days. In defending this conclusion, Postell strongly underscores the evidence of structure and inner-biblical exegesis.

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# Toward a Marginalized View of Messianic Prophecy

- *Accepting Ambiguity and Embracing Vulnerability*

by **Andrew Barron**

The medieval polemicist Isaac Troki, author of the famous book *Hizzuk Emunah (Faith Strengthened)*, famously said that the question of messianic prophecy has already been settled with regard to any fulfillment in Jesus of Nazareth. Troki's learning and sober reflection have been a source of inspiration for polemicists over the centuries. I have found myself using his book countless times over the years precisely because Troki does not set up straw men; he uses the data readily available to all of us. Troki wrote:

I was once asked by a Christian scholar, "Why do you Jews refuse to believe that Jesus Christ was the Messiah, evidence concerning him having been given by the true prophets, in whose words you also believe?" And this is the answer which I gave him; How is it possible for us to believe that he was the Messiah, as we do not see any actual proof of his Messiahship throughout the prophetic writings. A few of these arguments may be here introduced. He was not the Messiah is evident:—first, from his pedigree; second, from his acts; third, from the period in which he lived; and fourth, from the fact that, during his existence, the promises were not fulfilled which are to be realized on the advent of the expected Messiah, whereas the fulfillment of the conditions alone can warrant a belief in the identity of the Messiah.<sup>1</sup>

Nineteenth-century Jewish Christian apologist David Baron came to a very different conclusion:

The child of the promise is still nourished from the breasts of the mother of hope, who in turn is revived and quickened with the new

<sup>1</sup> Isaac Troki, *Faith Strengthened*, trans. Moses Mocatta (London: J. Wertheimer and Co., 1851), <http://www.faithstrengthened.org/FSpart1chapter01.html> (accessed December 20, 2011).



life which she receives back from her own offspring. The Christ of history is merely the fruit of the tree of prophecy.<sup>2</sup>

What we see in these diametrically opposed viewpoints is that apologists and polemicists are frequently locked into what we can call “rival certainties.” Our world is characterized by polarized argumentation. Can we expect genuine dialogue to be reduced to, and settled by, simple debate in a world where reality appears dichotomized and where winning is often more important than understanding?<sup>3</sup> An attitude of *vulnerability* and *marginality* needs to be the praxis by which messianic prophecy is brought to bear on our gospel communication.

From the beginning of scriptural history, God has consistently shown that He works with people within their own frame of reference. Therefore, we have to make adjustments in our communication to others. We need to stop thinking inside our culture of power and argumentation and enter a world of vulnerability, ambiguity, and story. I am not saying that scholars and apologists today are consciously seeking to accumulate personal power via winning arguments. However, given our environment, many of us have perhaps unconsciously adopted this mode of thinking.

The study and use of messianic prophecy should be characterized by this kind of radical transformation. Edmund O’Sullivan defines *transformative learning* as the “experience of a deep structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feelings, and actions. It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically and irreversibly alters our way of being in the world.”<sup>4</sup> I submit that in our use of messianic prophecy, we need to accept ambiguity and embrace vulnerability.

## Accepting Ambiguity

First, though, a word about *ambiguity*. I believe that, contrary to our evangelical instincts, we often experience Scripture as ambiguous. Note how I phrased that: It cannot be ambiguous in the mind of God but often appears that way in our experience. In this, our experience of Scripture is part of our overall experience of life. All of us have particular presuppositions which are grounded in a kind of cognitive orientation. This orientation is the basis by which individuals understand, cope, and integrate together the ambiguities of the world.

How does Scripture appear ambiguous in our experience? As an example, concepts such as “Suffering Servant” and “Messiah” are certainly clear in the mind of God. Yet as we grapple with the texts that speak of these things, we discover that the idea of the Suffering Servant contains an element of mystery (can we know what was in Isaiah’s mind: Israel? Messiah?

2 David Baron, *Rays of Messiah’s Glory* (London: Hebrew Christian Testimony to Israel, 1886), 14.

3 Edmund O’Sullivan, ed., *Expanding the Boundaries of Transformative Learning* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

4 *Ibid.*, 11.



both?). Again, we find Jesus instructing people not to tell what He has done for them for fear of them *not* understanding God's intention. The danger is that as they experience the idea of Messiah with ambiguity, they will misunderstand God's meaning. Indeed, the experience of ambiguity is the reason that the disciples could not, until they received the Holy Spirit, ascertain the nature of Jesus' mission despite His constant teaching on the subject.

Therefore, when we think about messianic prophecy, we have to come to terms with our inability to know it completely. As Abraham Heschel put it, the interpretation of prophecy is already "an exegesis of an exegesis."<sup>5</sup> The Old Testament messianic vision is at best experienced as hazy, uncertain, and ambiguous without the New Testament.

### Remembrance, Marginality, and Story

My journey into the world of accepting ambiguity and embracing vulnerability with regard to messianic prophecy began in 1986. I was engaged in evangelistic outreach in downtown Providence, Rhode Island. My team set up a book table at a downtown pedestrian mall. It was a beautiful New England spring day, and I had my literature in hand as I engaged in distributing tracts. I had a promising conversation with an intelligent man who was on his lunch break. This was right in the middle of an academic year at Gordon-Conwell Seminary. Flush with my academic learning at the ready, I laid out the case for Messiah using the best tools at my disposal. I will never forget what he said: "You may be right, but for me, being Jewish means not believing that."

The interesting parts of my life often occur when I am utterly flabbergasted and frustrated. This was one of those times. I tried to respond to him, but nothing shook the fundamental reality that I realized only later: He defined himself by what he did *not* believe.

Over the course of twenty-nine years as a missionary to the Jews, I have shared the gospel with thousands of my people throughout North America, Israel, South Africa, and Germany. If I have learned anything, it is that what my friend in Providence was saying to me had its basis in *story*. In Jewish thinking, story is often what matters most. In my Rhode Island friend's mind, his story was one of the cultural dominance of Christendom and our people's ancient impulse to self-preserve.

There is *power* in story and remembrance. We unconsciously think, "If my story is not your story, then I am inside my culture, and you are inside your culture. Because you have accepted a foreign story, you are not in our story. If you are in our story, then you are on the margin."

Marginality is "the temporary state of having been put aside of living in relative isolation, at the edge of a system (cultural, social, political or economic) . . . in mind, when one excludes certain domains or phenomena from one's thinking, because they do not correspond to the mainstream

5 Abraham Heschel, *The Prophets: An Introduction* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), xiv.



philosophy.”<sup>6</sup> Though the word has a negative connotation to it, yet there is a sense both in our theological understanding and in transformative learning that marginality is a new place of discovery and a place from which to begin the journey.

In his book *Marginality*,<sup>7</sup> Jung Young Lee states that his marginal experience is the basis of a contextual theology. *Marginality* proposes a framework that justifies and undergirds development of contextual theologies, without becoming itself dominating. Lee aims to address the dilemmas of contextual theology, not by moving one or another group from the margin to the center, but by *redefining marginality itself as central*. Based on his marginal experiences in the United States, he strongly affirms that our theology, mission, thinking, and commitments have to be based on a new marginality of self-affirmation through suffering love. A new marginal person is the one who relentlessly hopes for harmony on the one hand and fights against the negative side of marginality through suffering love on the other hand.

There is an *implied social contract* in the Jewish community which states that Jews are outside the margins if they believe that Jesus is the Messiah of Israel. A missionary to my people works to bring Jesus back into the center of Jewish religious, social, and thought life. Following Lee, we must create a strategy by which the social contract is redefined so that the marginal Jesus is now central to modern Jewish hope. The new narrative needs to be centered on Israel as the bearer of God’s promises for the world and, finally, focused on Israel’s true King and the fulfillment of the destiny of the Jews.

I believe the best way to do this is through a reclaimed narrative which proclaims Jesus as the Jewish Messiah, the one about which Moses and the prophets spoke. In this new narrative, Jewish hope in Jesus becomes the *Jewish thing to do* and *that which was on the margin is now central*.

As a Jew who loves Jesus, I have found myself on the margins of the Christian movement even though I am a conventional Christian in thought and temperament. The Christian movement, as all renewal movements, began on the margins of the ecclesiastical structures of the day, so in a sense I feel at home on the margin. I believe that the gospel will always be seen as counter-cultural. A journey in transformative learning will undergird and reinforce what I hope to accomplish while challenging my own presuppositions in the matter.

## Power in Ambiguity and Weakness

Sometimes I have heard Christians ask why Jewish people, when they hear the gospel, just do not “get it.” After all, it is so obvious when we read the Old Testament and compare it to the New! This response ultimately comes

6 International Geographical Union, *Marginality: Concepts and Their Limitations* (Zurich: IGU, 2003), 2.

7 Jung Young Lee, *Marginality* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1995).

from a position of power, using the authority of the church to convince people of the rightness of the message.

In contrast, in 2 Corinthians 6, we find a number of key recurring concepts by means of which Paul characterizes his ministry and himself. These concepts are *weakness*, *suffering*, and *affliction*. There are other key concepts that contrast with these which are used with equal frequency—concepts such as *power*, *joy*, and *boasting*. These two seemingly contradictory sets of concepts have a foundational bearing on how we might go about interpreting and proclaiming messianic prophecy.

Paul is unique in the way he speaks about the brokenness of the ministry worker. Nowhere is the disproportion between the greatness of the task and the flimsiness of the equipment more clearly seen. It seems that to Paul, ministry activity is the weakest and least impressive human activity imaginable—the antithesis of a theology of power and glory. This is not by accident but by design; it is a precondition of the worker for any authentic mission. The supreme sign of Jesus' credential of power was His death—His only method of convincing and dominating human hearts.

In 2 Corinthians 6:8–10, there are seven clauses which are introduced by the word “yet”:

[Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way (v. 4)]  
 . . . through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything.<sup>8</sup>

Paul does not mean to suggest that the conditions to which he refers are not real. They *are* real, and it is normal for his ministry to be carried out under the conditions he describes. Being unknown, weak and dying, disciplined, in sorrow and poverty are normal conditions in his ministry. If you will, they authenticate his ministry as being Jesus-focused. We are not spiritual giants but broken men and women who lead others to the cross. This is the story of a new kind of kingdom where a cross is a sign of victory.

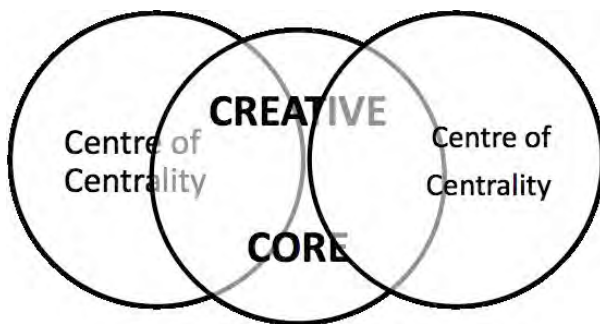
This profoundly affects our own spirituality as workers in mission. The possibility of Jews coming to Messiah does not involve the vulnerability only of the one we are leading to Christ. Also, and more urgently, it involves our own vulnerability as missionaries to the Jews. Jesus revealed sin, because He became vulnerable; had He been invulnerable, the true nature of sin would have remained hidden. In contrast, force—or the threat of force—inhibits creativity and also results in social systems in which our basest human qualities are reinforced and our highest aspirations are suppressed.

<sup>8</sup> All Scripture citations are from the New International Version (1984), unless otherwise noted.

Therefore, we can either use weakness as an excuse not to take responsibility or we can reject it and demand strength and power to carry on. This means a reevaluation of all our values. It is imposters who speak the truth, unknown men who are known, the dying who live on, and the sorrowful who have cause for joy. The poor bring wealth, and the penniless own the world.

Jesus spent His entire life at the margins, yet most human beings want centrality, not marginality. In fact we—the followers of Messiah—want to be at the center of centrality. But the truth is that Jesus calls us to the margins. How do we become disciples? We become disciples through the cross. “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Mark 8:34). The implication is that we all have a cross to bear. To be a son of the living God does not put us at the center; it puts us on the margin of marginality! We are the servants of all the servants.<sup>9</sup>

A paradigm exists where that which Lee called the “creative core” is different from that which people naturally seek. He shows us in the following diagram that this process does not seek to “dominate but harmonizes margins with coexistence.”<sup>10</sup>



Adopting this paradigm offers a different perspective on messianic prophecy. One moves from a central power base to the margin. The new center *is* at the margin. *Whereas centrality is interested in dominance (one's credentials), the marginal person seeks reconciliation (a shared narrative).* When the margins meet, there is the margin of marginality—which is Jesus the Messiah! This creative core compels reconciliation. God was in Messiah Jesus to reconcile the world to Himself (2 Cor 5:19).

When we shift to the margin where we belong, we bring the center with us as we invite people to the margin—as opposed to inviting the people at the margin to the center. And then, the human condition is for the new center to become dominant once again—and so we must continually repeat the process.

<sup>9</sup> Lee, 78.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 98.



## An Example of a Marginalized View of Messianic Prophecy: Luke 24

Truth is rooted in story—not in systems, creeds, doctrine, or apologetics. The Scriptures contain the story by which the people of God have always understood their lives—and it *is* a story, not an anthology. As a story, it requires an ending. In Scripture, we see the human story side by side with the story of God. The characteristic of the living God is that He speaks and wants to be understood. This sets Him apart from all other gods who are, *ipso facto*, idols.<sup>11</sup> We know this God by knowing His story.

The story has a hero—the God of Israel. This is a God who makes Himself known to us in the context of our shared stories, ambiguities, and vulnerabilities. It is the story of one particular people, Israel, against the backdrop of the nations. A people is chosen to be the bearer of His purpose—chosen for suffering, agony, and conflict. It is a story of brokenness—no one is unbroken. This story shows us that God will not leave us until He has won us back. He wins us back by sharing in our brokenness, ambiguity, and vulnerability.

In the world of the Gospels, we Jews were home, and yet we were not really home. The exile was not yet really over, and most knew it. The promises of the prophets were incomplete. The world and Israel still needed “redeeming”—this was most likely *code* for the exodus, the exodus was our moment; what we needed in the first century was covenant renewal. The Hebrew Scriptures contain this story that yearns for an ending.<sup>12</sup>

The crucifixion of Jesus must have devastated that hope for His followers. They thought Israel would be liberated and found out that, as far as they knew, they were mistaken. It is not simply that Jesus’ followers knew from Deuteronomy that a crucified person was under God’s curse. Nor was it simply that they had not yet worked out a theology of Jesus’ atoning death. The crucifixion already had, for them, a perfectly clear theological as well as political meaning: *it meant that the exile was still continuing, that God had not forgiven Israel’s sins, and that pagans were still ruling the world.* Their thirst for redemption, for God’s light and truth to come and lead them, had still not been satisfied. We have to hold this in our minds if we wish to understand Luke 24, the story of the road to Emmaus, at its most basic level.<sup>13</sup>

The Gospel accounts show us that Jesus’ followers thought that the ending was going to happen with Jesus. And clearly, it had not. *Where were the kingdom of God, holiness, and military victory? The remnant would defeat the pagans. This is how it had always been in the Scriptures, and this would be when the great climax came, when Israel’s God would become King of the entire world.* “We had hoped that he was the one who was

11 Cf. Victor Shepherd, “Emil Ludwig Fackenheim 1916–2003: Philosopher, Professor, Rabbi, Friend,” *Touchstone* (2008): 7–8.

12 Cf. N. T. Wright, “The Resurrection and the Postmodern Dilemma,” *Sewanee Theological Review* 41.2 (1998).

13 *Ibid.*

going to redeem Israel" (Luke 24:21). This explains, of course, why the two disciples were arguing so vigorously. They had been traveling up a road they thought was leading to freedom, and it turned out to be a cul-de-sac.<sup>14</sup>

The response from Jesus is to *tell the story*—differently than the apostles were used to hearing it—and to show that within the historical precedents, the prophetic promises, and the psalmists' prayers there lay a constant theme and pattern. This, then, was after all how the story worked; this was the narrative the prophets had been elaborating. The Scriptures were indeed to be read as *a narrative reaching its climax*. They never were a mere collection of arbitrary or atomized proof texts. "And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself" (24:27). This could never be a matter of messianic proof texts alone. It was the entire narrative, the complete storyline of our brokenness and His. Their slowness of heart and lack of belief in the prophets had not, therefore, been a purely spiritual blindness. It had been a matter of telling and living the wrong story—or at least the right story in the wrong way.

Suppose the reason the key would not fit the lock was that they were trying the wrong door? Suppose Jesus' execution was not the clear disproof of His messianic vocation but its confirmation and climax? Suppose the cross was not one more example of the triumph of paganism over God's people but was actually God's means of defeating evil once and for all? Suppose this was, after all, how the exile was designed to end, how sins were to be forgiven, and how the kingdom was to come? Suppose this was what God's light and truth looked like, coming unexpectedly to lead His people back into His presence?<sup>15</sup>

How then are we to communicate the correct story? We cannot just hurl systems at people. That will either crush them or drive them away. Of course mission and evangelism were never actually a matter of throwing doctrine at our listeners. They work in far more holistic ways by praxis, symbol, and story, as well as by what we, in a somewhat modernist way, think of as "straightforward" exposition of "truth."

We must get used to a mission that includes living the true Christian praxis of brokenness, ambiguity, and vulnerability. If this is truly happening, it cannot be damaged by the postmodern critique, hermeneutics of suspicion, or anything else. We must get used to telling the story of God, Israel, Jesus, and the world as the true metanarrative, the story of our own brokenness, ambiguity, and vulnerability. We must get used to living as those who have truly died and risen with Christ so that our self, having been thoroughly deconstructed, can be put back together.<sup>16</sup>

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.



## Conclusion

As I write this, it is the first day of Hanukkah. Jesus famously said on Hanukkah, “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30). Earlier, He had claimed to be a shepherd. When I think of shepherds, I think of the ancient equivalent of outlaws, people on the margins of society. In the ancient Near East, shepherds were poorly paid, transient, and armed to protect their flocks—characteristics that made them widely suspected and feared. Even if a shepherd told you that he was not a criminal, he was surely thinking of being one! Messiah is equal with the Father and yet equal to the shepherd. He is on the margin yet is central. It is by this praxis that we can move away from a power orientation that relies on the transmission of information and toward a shared narrative that opens us to the possibility of vulnerability, brokenness, and ambiguity.

We must explain and persuade. When we engage in the praxis of vulnerability, brokenness, and ambiguity, we re-engage who we are with what we say. Our witness and our identity are transformed, and our status and existence are empowered (1 Pet 2:9–12).

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# Metanarratives and Messianic Prophecy

by **Richard A. Robinson**



## Introduction

The use of messianic prophecy in Jewish evangelism, though it has been a bulwark of Jewish missions—and an often effective one—has not adequately engaged the mainstream Jewish community. One reason, which is a holdover from a post-Enlightenment modernist mindset, is that the presentation is sometimes done in an overly mechanical way that is not always well-suited to the lives of those to whom we are speaking.<sup>1</sup> By “mechanical,” I mean an approach such as a presentation of lists of prophecies and fulfillments. Such an approach will appeal to some people, but are there other ways to present messianic prophecy more holistically to twenty-first-century Jewish concerns?<sup>2</sup>

The traditional, time-honored way of presenting messianic prophecy is along these lines: God provided “credentials” of the Messiah in the Hebrew Bible—the miraculous nature of His birth, His birthplace, the course of His life, His resurrection, and so on—which are recorded in various prophecies. These were in due course fulfilled in the life of Jesus, who is the only person who matches these “credentials,” thus verifying His true messiahship. To be sure, we can argue from the larger context, original intention, and so on, rather than merely proof texting. But it seems to me that this approach, however well-handled, will only speak to a portion of Jewish people—perhaps a smaller portion than we want to acknowledge. Why this is so will become clear shortly.

A case can be made that the apostles themselves did not see things as neatly as presenting a list of prophecies and fulfillments. While they ar-

1 In this way it reflects other apologetic moves which can also become overly mechanical, as when we argue the necessity for Messiah’s sacrifice by simply saying that God “requires” such a sacrifice—thus playing down the relational element.

2 On the side of Scripture, messianic prophecy should be related organically to its overall context in a particular book and in the canon. This paper is more concerned with the side of the recipients of the scriptural message.

rived at the same endpoint, the New Testament does not neatly “line up the dots.”<sup>3</sup>

As a corollary to the traditional handling of messianic prophecy, one must explain why the apostles and many other Jews showed an apparent lack of understanding of the prophecies, failing to realize that they spoke of a suffering, dying, atoning Messiah. A frequent explanation is that the Jewish people had a misplaced expectation. They were wrongly hoping for an ancient version of the MTV show *Bully Beatdown* whereby the Messiah would take down Rome once and for all. This viewpoint would then have clouded their scriptural understanding such that they failed to expect a suffering, atoning Messiah.

There is truth to this, but it is not the full truth. Undoubtedly people were hoping for a military Messiah and freedom from the domination of Rome and other oppressing overlords.<sup>4</sup> The apostles spoke not only atomistically—clearly the Gospels cite individual verses and pronounce their fulfillment<sup>5</sup>—but placed their proclamation in terms of an understood context in Scripture *as well as in terms of a much larger picture*: the fulfillment of Israel’s hopes to be redeemed and to end exile. In other words, the Jewish people at the time of Rome had a *metanarrative* which filtered their understanding of Scripture. In many ways, the metanarrative came first; Scripture then fit into that larger narrative. In truth, their interrelationship is more of a “hermeneutical spiral,” with Scripture challenging the metanarrative and the narrative reflecting back to Scripture, until the meaning of the Scripture could be better ascertained. In practice, however, metanarratives are held dearly; the world, even the Bible, becomes subservient to them until those narratives are challenged.<sup>6</sup>

When someone does respond to the list-fulfillment presentation of messianic prophecies, *it is likely that their metanarrative already embraces a welcoming of the idea of prediction and fulfillment*. This could be true, for example, of a New Age person who has studied Nostradamus or who finds the idea of “seeing into the future” compatible with their spirituality. Hal

3 This is true even though scholars have long spoken of the early church as compiling such lists (*testimonia*); it is true even though Jesus taught the disciples on the Emmaus road about how the Scriptures spoke of Himself; it is true even though the apostolic sermons in Acts reference specific verses as prophecies now being fulfilled. The modernistic approach to “lining up the dots” is a considerably less organic approach than what we find in the New Testament. Particularly influenced by rational modernism is the approach of asking, “What is the mathematical probability of all these prophecies being fulfilled in one person?” Besides begging the question, this approach generates its own question: What is the mathematical probability of this line of approach influencing many Jewish people?

4 I am aware that there were a variety of messianic expectations among different groups of Jews. However, given the many aborted rebellions, the Zealot movement, and the two revolts against Rome—the second of which saw a leading rabbi declare Bar Kochba to be the Messiah—it would appear that many if not most Jews directed their hopes for deliverance in that direction.

5 Compare R. Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain, “In Defense of Proof-Texting,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 54.3 (2011): 589–606.

6 Compare the debate over the Reformed use of “presuppositional apologetics” vis-à-vis “evidential apologetics.” Does the former have more staying power through different eras and is the latter more suited to the modernist period?

Lindsay's *Late Great Planet Earth*<sup>7</sup> played a formative role in the journey of not a few Jewish people to faith in Jesus in the early '70s, but that was likely because their metanarrative already had a place for that sort of approach.

To put it another way, metanarratives are born out of complex interactions with history, one's surroundings, and interactions with others. They are not generally based on a linear exposition of Scripture or of anything else. An instructive example comes from the phenomenon of Shabbatai Zevi, the infamous seventeenth-century false messiah who attracted a huge following among European Jews before he converted to Islam—and even afterwards! Shabbatai's advance man—his publicist, Nathan of Gaza—wrote tracts advocating for the messiahship of Shabbatai. Yet as a recent writer notes, "Although Nathan's writings may have been a part of this picture, it is clear that an ordinary Jew would not examine his tracts, decide that they were convincing as mystical reasoning in the Lurianic tradition, and then choose to believe. A far more powerful unifying factor was the willingness of seventeenth-century Jews to believe in acceptably validated messianic prophecies, especially those of a Kabbalist like Nathan of Gaza [in this context, spontaneous contemporary prophecy, not biblical prophecy]."<sup>8</sup> In other words, the larger metanarrative and not linear, logical argumentation helped account for the Shabbatai phenomenon.<sup>9</sup>

## Six Easy Pieces: A Sextet of Metanarratives<sup>10</sup>

In what follows, I describe and visually illustrate four leading metanarratives that have been held among Jewish people and two found specifically among Jewish, as well as non-Jewish, believers in Jesus. These are no more than preliminary sketches, and so at times may appear to be caricatures or inaccurate. My goal is to show how different metanarratives require different approaches, rather than to give a rigorously developed taxonomy. So, I am deliberately painting with a broad brush.

The six metanarratives we will examine are: (1) Traditional Orthodox Jewish; (2) Lurianic Kabbalistic; (3) Secular Liberal Jewish; (4) Classical Secular Zionist; (5) Traditional Christian; and (6) Kinzerian.

### 1. The Traditional Orthodox Jewish Metanarrative

Traditional Judaism does not concern itself much with the entrance of sin into the world, but it recognizes sin and evil as givens. God created a good universe, and He created humanity with good and evil inclinations—the

7 Hal Lindsey [with Carole C. Carlson], *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970).

8 Matt Goldish, *The Sabbatean Prophets* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 7.

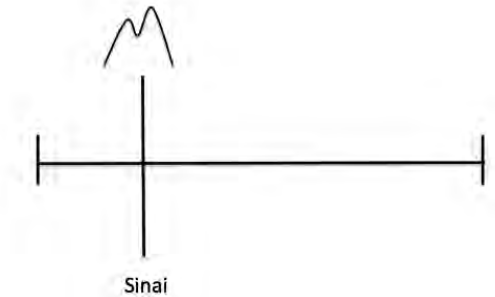
9 Similarly, Goldish speaks of "the impact of the seventeenth-century environment, which gave so much authority to contemporary prophecy" (*ibid.*, 2).

10 I presented some of these in another context in "'When Worlds Collide!': Jews, Comics, and Alternate Universes," *Issues* 16:5, which is available online at [http://www.jewsforjesus.org/publications/issues/16\\_05/comicslonger](http://www.jewsforjesus.org/publications/issues/16_05/comicslonger) (download the PDF version to see the illustrations).



*yezter hara* and *yezter hatov*.<sup>11</sup> God then chose the nation of Israel, with whom He entered into a covenant at Mount Sinai. The Jewish people are God's own treasured possession and are obligated to observe the 613 *mitzvot* given at Mount Sinai. In order to enable Israel to observe the *mitzvot* properly, God gave the "Oral Torah," the interpretation of the "written Torah." This was also given at Sinai and further developed through the divinely designated authority of the rabbis.<sup>12</sup> The high point of this story is Sinai; as was said in a different context, "the rest is commentary." At the end of history, the (human) messiah will arrive to establish peace and justice, return all Jews to the land of Israel, and rebuild the temple. Potentially, such a messiah exists in every generation, but it devolves on the Jewish people to be worthy of him through keeping the *mitzvot*.

This metanarrative can be pictured like this:



## 2. The Lurianic Kabbalistic Metanarrative

This refers to a form of Kabbalah that was developed by the sixteenth-century rabbi Isaac Luria. It has captured the imagination of many in the modern world as well, perhaps because it brings a kind of "mythological" as well as mystical approach to reality.

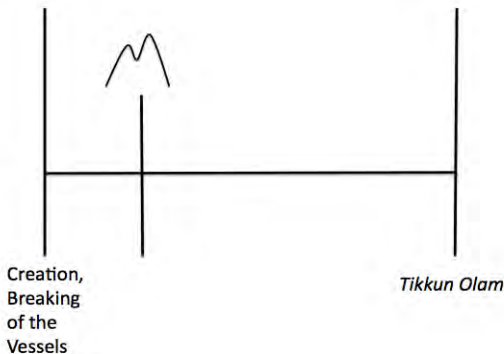
In the Lurianic Kabbalah, although Sinai may be stressed as much as in traditional Orthodox Judaism, emphasis is additionally put on the beginnings of creation and on the nature of God Himself. God-in-Himself is known as the *Ein Sof*, "Without End." By means of "contraction" into Himself (*tzimtzum*), God enabled the creation of the universe. Furthermore, He mediated "himself to creation via ten emanations or *sefirot*. The *sefirot* sustain a complex relationship to one another and to the world. When God created the universe, divine sparks were encased in shells or vessels which somehow broke open, causing the sparks to fall to earth. From this *shevirat kelim* ("breaking of the vessels"), evil has entered the world. It is now incumbent on all Jews to perform the *mitzvot* in order to raise the sparks and bring about *tikkun olam*, the restoration of the universe.

11 More specifically, traditional Judaism considers the *yetzer hatov* to enter a person later on, at about thirteen years of age.

12 In Conservative Judaism, authority tends to be located within the people of Israel as a whole.

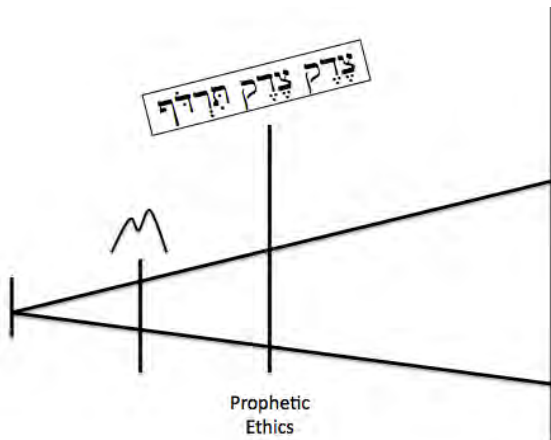
In contrast to traditional Orthodox Judaism, which emphasizes the centrality of Sinai and the ongoing importance of observing *mitzvot*—and so is very “now-minded”—Lurianic Kabbalah emphasizes the centrality of creation/“fall” (i.e., the breaking of the vessels) and the ultimate restoration. To be sure, the *mitzvot* also naturally occupy a central role, but the arc of the story is more consciously traced from beginning to end, whereas traditional Judaism focuses for all practical purposes more on the present, i.e., the middle.

This metanarrative can be pictured like this:



**3. The Secular Liberal Jewish Metanarrative**

Liberal/Reform Judaism is a product of the *Haskalah* (Jewish Enlightenment) and its break with religious tradition. Therefore, its narrative is a more secular one revolving around ideas of evolutionary progress. Certainly in its earlier modernist form, it focused on mankind’s own perfection of the world. In this narrative, the ethics of the prophets and the rabbis is front and center as compared to Orthodoxy’s emphasis on tradition, ritual, and *mitzvot*. Secular Liberal Judaism’s upbeat optimism is really the secular narrative of progress in Jewish clothing. It can be pictured like this:

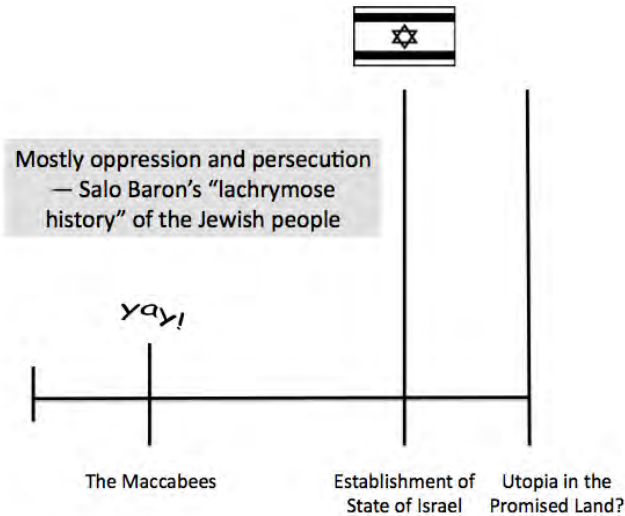


The liberal Jewish model is no longer as optimistic as in an earlier era. Today it shares more in common with postmodernist than with modernist trends. This means that there is perhaps no longer any overarching metanarrative. Nevertheless, "the oftnoted attraction of Jews to liberal and left-wing political causes probably represents a secular attempt to usher in a messianic age."<sup>13</sup>

#### 4. The Classical Secular Zionist Metanarrative

This is the Zionism of a previous generation which was built upon national aspirations and idealism. Here, there is no concern with questions of creation or a fall into evil; evil is perhaps seen most in the pervasive oppression of the Jewish people. While the Maccabean victory (commemorated at Hanukkah) provided some relief, not until 1948 did "redemption" arrive with the establishment of the State of Israel. The horizon is limited, in this classic form, by the goal of a Jewish homeland. Once that homeland was established, *kibbutzim* and *moshavim*, reclamation of the desert and the spirit of the *halutzim* (pioneers) contributed to the hope that a utopia could be established in the Land, with not a little ideological impulse from the socialist movements of Europe.

While Zionism has had many streams, from religious to secular, the classical secular narrative looks like this:



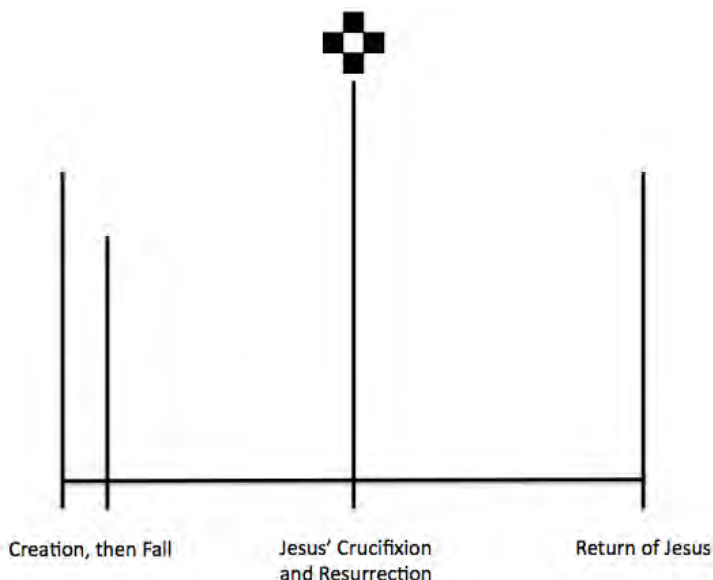
My two final metanarratives are views held by a variety of Jewish as well as non-Jewish believers in Jesus.

13 Joseph Telushkin, "The Messiah," Jewish Virtual Library, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/messiah.html> (accessed June 13, 2012). This article was excerpted (with permission) from Joseph Telushkin, *Jewish Literacy* (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1991). The Hebrew in the illustration is from Deuteronomy 16:20, traditionally rendered "Justice, justice shall you pursue."



### 5. The Traditional Christian Metanarrative

The traditional Christian metanarrative runs along these lines: creation, then the fall (compare Lurianic Kabbalah), the establishment of Israel as a nation (intended to show in microcosm God's redemptive activity), Israel's failure, the coming of the Messiah Jesus through Israel, His death and resurrection to atone for sin and accomplish redemption (which we experience in a "now/not-yet" manner), and His return in the future to complete the redemption of His people and of the universe. The high point in this narrative is the death/resurrection of Jesus, and this metanarrative can be illustrated in this way:



Note that some variations of the traditional Christian narrative see an ongoing role for Israel in the purposes of God and other variations do not, but it is not necessary to enter into those differences here.

### 6. The Kinzerian Metanarrative

R. Kendall Soulen's influential book *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*<sup>14</sup> spoke of three kinds of supersessionism, one of which he called "structural supersessionism." In structural supersessionism, the canon has been—and often still is—understood by the church in a way that minimizes

14 R. Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: FortressPress, 1996).

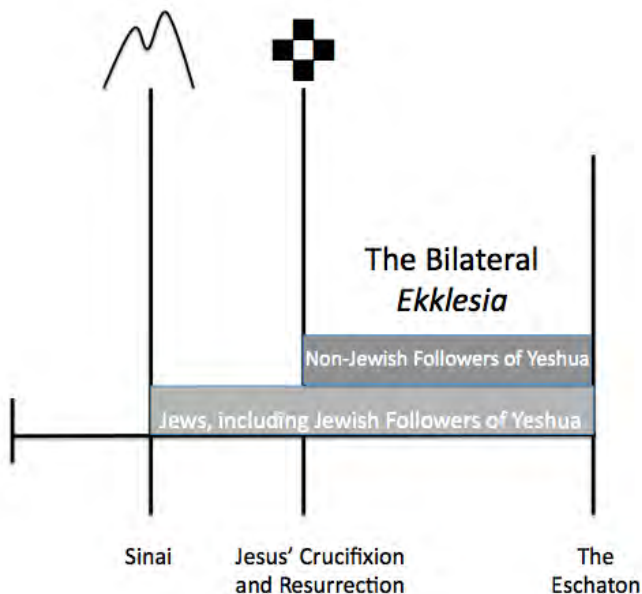
the place of the Hebrew Scriptures and the Jewish people.<sup>15</sup> Essentially, the Christian *reading* of the canon jumps from creation/fall to the New Testament/Jesus. The history of Israel, i.e., most of the Old Testament, becomes marginalized and the nation of Israel itself reduced to a failure and a vehicle for the Messiah, without its own integrity within the overall story.

In addressing structural and other kinds of supersessionism, Mark Kinzer's *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism* offers another metanarrative from the perspective of a Jewish follower of Jesus. In this narrative, we still have the Christian view of creation and fall.<sup>16</sup> In addition we have the centrality of Sinai and the Sinaitic covenant, as in traditional Judaism, *along with* the centrality of Jesus' death and resurrection, the two standing in some tension with one another.<sup>17</sup> Jewish followers of Jesus form one wing of a "bilateral *ekklesia*" in which they have a covenantal obligation to observe the *mitzvot* as understood by (rabbinic) authority, which is vested in the people as a whole. In fact, Jesus has been in some way "hidden" within the Jewish people over the past 2,000 years such that He and they are inseparable, their "no" to Jesus having been—in their understanding and in the light of Christian anti-Judaism—a "yes" to the Sinai covenant and hence a "yes" to God. For Jewish followers of Jesus, their faith is a "messianic" species of the larger genus "Judaism." At the end of history, Jesus the Messiah will return and complete the restoration of all things, in which—Kinzer remains ambiguous—there may be the possibility of all (faithful?) Jewish people (of all time?) finding a salvific relationship with Jesus.

This metanarrative can be pictured like this:

- 15 Darrell Bock describes structural supersessionism as arguing "that the canon is structured in such a way that the Hebrew Scripture is irrelevant for understanding God's purposes. Here is where Soulen sees the major problem because it is the structural reading of Scripture that leads to the other expressions of supersessionism" (Darrell L. Bock, "Replacement Theology with Implications for Messianic Jewish Relations," in *Jesus, Salvation and the Jewish People: Papers on the Uniqueness of Jesus and Jewish Evangelism Presented at a Conference Conducted by the WEA Theological Commission 18–22 August 2008 Woltersdorf, Berlin, Germany*, ed. David Parker [Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2011], 238).
- 16 As far as I know, Kinzer has yet to write extensively on creation and the entrance of sin into the world.
- 17 Cf. Kinzer on the unresolved tension between rabbinic authority and the authority Jesus invested in His followers. "While foretelling the imminent end of the priestly Sanhedrin, Yeshua also (according to Matthew) affirmed that the Pharisaic scribes 'sit on Moses' seat,' and thus their position as heirs of Moses is reinforced. At the same time, Yeshua exercises his unique authority as the Messiah and grants halakhic authority to his closest followers. Thus, the old Sanhedrin loses its power, to be replaced by two institutions in tension with one another" (Mark Kinzer, *Israel's Messiah and the People of God: A Vision for Messianic Jewish Covenant Fidelity*, ed. Jennifer Rosner [Eugene: Cascade Books, 2011], 59); and ". . . any Messianic Jewish version of the Oral Torah must recognize two legitimate halakhic authorities in tension—those recognized by the Jewish community as a whole, and those presiding over its messianic subcommunity" (*ibid.*, 61).





### Speaking the Gospel into Each Metanarrative

People espouse particular metanarratives for reasons that include social milieu, personal temperament and upbringing, a quest for meaning, purpose, or truth, or some other goal. With each metanarrative comes a set of presuppositions—an interpretive grid—that will influence how someone responds to a different metanarrative than the one to which they have adhered.

Therefore, any discussion of the gospel with someone from one of the first four metanarratives described must first find points of connection or entrée and at the same time challenge the presuppositions of that narrative. For this reason, not everyone can be expected to respond to a list of “prophecies and their fulfillment” with understanding or interest, let alone faith. People will bring different questions and even different *interpretations of questions* into the conversation. I have heard the story of a postmodern person being asked, “Do you know why Jesus died?” to which the response was, “Because He stopped breathing.” Assuming the respondent was not just being flip, it shows how in the postmodern mindset someone hears not a question of purpose—why assume there *is* a purpose to someone’s death?—but a technical question.

Again, so the story goes, someone was presented with this option: If Jesus rose from the dead, doesn’t that prove He was God? The answer came back: No, it just proves that we live in a universe where weird things happen. So our questions themselves need to speak into people’s narratives. Asking what the probability is that one person fulfilled all the messianic



prophecies will more likely than not elicit a shrug from many. They have more pressing questions that impinge on their own narrative!

In finding points of entrée, it will help to observe the high point, the central act of each narrative, which helps define its vision of the world. Those high points can lead to fruitful opportunities to speak the gospel into that narrative. I will offer some suggestions for speaking into the first four narratives, including the use of messianic prophecy. (I have presented the other two narratives, reflecting two views of Jewish and non-Jewish believers in Jesus, in order that they might serve as reminders that even followers of Jesus have their own narratives that affect how we engage each other—and perhaps suggest ways for fruitful dialogue *among* believers.)

Again, these are in the nature of sketches; some may suggest a different picture of a particular narrative, while the nuances of a given narrative will depend on the particular conversation partners. Someone might also think of different entrées than mine into these metanarratives.

### **1. The Traditional Orthodox Jewish Metanarrative**

We must not assume that because Orthodox Jews (in theory, at least) accept the divine origin of Scripture, we are on a level playing field. We are not. Orthodox Jews filter Scripture through rabbinic interpretation. Among the most traditional, a challenge to “see what the Bible says by itself” may be viewed as a childish, immature way of approaching Scripture. After all, in traditional Jewish education, Torah by itself, *Chumash*, is for beginners; older students learn Mishnah and after that Talmud, Tosafot, the commentators, and so on. “Seeing what the Bible says by itself” may not come as a challenge, but as an unwelcome invitation to bypass divinely-established rabbinic authority and accumulated wisdom. At the very least, such a conversation may end up as two people talking past one another.<sup>18</sup>

Moreover, it is only partly useful to point out passages in the Tanakh which the rabbis recognized as messianic. It is true that this can be helpful in showing that Christians are not “graspers-at-straws” when invoking the Hebrew Scriptures. But a problem comes when our views align only up to a point, yet without agreement on the endpoint that Jesus fulfills the necessary prophecies. After all, in the Orthodox narrative, the Messiah does not die as an atonement, but lives as a rebuilders of the temple, a bringer of peace, and a gatherer of scattered Israel. Nevertheless, this has sometimes been a fruitful entrée (see note 17) that is well traversed and does not need to be rehearsed here.<sup>19</sup> But is there a better way to speak into this metanarrative?

In the traditional Jewish narrative, Sinai is the high point, but it is Sinai as interpreted by the authority of rabbis and the tradition. One entrée into

<sup>18</sup> Nothing is hard and fast, of course. For those disenchanted with rabbinic authority, or open to the possibility that rabbinic tradition does not have the final word, such a challenge may prove very fruitful. One must get to know one’s conversation partner in order to know what kind of conversation will be most helpful.

<sup>19</sup> Note too, though, that sometimes we fail to get our facts straight. Rashi was *not* the first to advocate the national interpretation of Isaiah 53, but he probably made it go viral.



such a narrative could, therefore, be to talk about the idea of authority. Here is one such path that involves a messianic passage:

In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. *He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.* (Dan 7:13–14)<sup>20</sup>

Someone might proceed by asking the question: “Who do you believe this individual is? How does his authority compare with the authority of the rabbis?” In the case of these verses, the question of authority naturally interfaces with messianic questions. Daniel 7:13 receives a messianic interpretation in the Talmud in *b. Sanhedrin* 98a, while in *b. Sanhedrin* 96b the Messiah is designated by R. Nahman as *Bar Nafle*. The Soncino footnote suggests that *Bar Nafle* originates from the Greek “son of the clouds,” referring to Daniel 7:13, though in Hebrew it translates as “son of the fallen.” There were also discussions as to whether God and His Messiah are represented in this passage, or whether it refers to God in two hypostases.<sup>21</sup> Rabbi Akiva interpreted the plural “thrones” of verse 9 as meaning one throne for God and one for David.<sup>22</sup>

From Daniel we can move to the New Testament and ask questions about who it is who is said to have such authority:

When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had *authority*, and not as their teachers of the law. (Matt 7:28–29)

Then Jesus came to them and said, “All *authority* in heaven and on earth has been given to me. . . .” (Matt 28:18)

One could even push the envelope with:

20 All Scripture citations are from the New International Version (1984), unless otherwise noted. The author has chosen to substitute Messiah for Christ in all citations, and his emphasis is indicated by the use of italics.

21 Cf. Douglas McCreedy, *He Came Down from Heaven: The Preexistence of Christ and Christian Faith* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 173–74, discussing the work of Alan Segal.

22 Cf. R. T. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 1992), 186, n. 58: “Hag, 14a; San. 38b. In the latter case the verse is quoted as one used by the ‘Minim’ (i.e., Christians), and Akiba’s explanation is rejected as too dangerous; alternative interpretations are suggested, which are not liable to a heretical understanding. Here we may perhaps see anti-Christian polemic beginning to undermine the previously agreed Messianic interpretation of the chapter.”

For in Messiah all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Messiah, who is the head over every power and *authority*. (Col 2:9–10)

Of what kind of person, we can ask, would this be said? Is it worthwhile to explore more about someone for whom this kind of authority is claimed and who claimed it for himself? We can also explore Jesus' use of the title "Son of Man," which is generally agreed to refer back to Daniel 7, in reference to Himself.

It can and should be pointed out to our Orthodox interlocutor (orig., "conversation partner") that this is not a denigration of the rabbinate. Within their own sphere of congregational and Jewish communal life, there is legitimate rabbinic authority:

I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in *authority*, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. (1 Tim 2:1–2)

These are only verses that utilize the word "authority." Messianic passages in the Tanakh that embody the *concept* of authority could also be used with New Testament counterparts. The idea is to introduce the gospel and messianic passages in a way that addresses the concerns and interests inherent in the Orthodox narrative. We can agree that Sinai has been central to our people but can challenge the presuppositions of a particular form of authority, while also addressing an intrinsic concern of this metanarrative. I do not hesitate to suggest using the New Testament when its concerns dovetail with those of the narrative we are addressing.

## **2. The Lurianic Kabbalistic Metanarrative**

In this narrative, while Sinai has centrality and is obligatory upon Jews, it tends to be overshadowed by the larger "myth" that explains creation, the origins of evil, and redemption. *Tikkun olam*, the repair of the world, accomplished by the performance of *mitzvot*, becomes a central motif of this narrative.

Here, creation and the entrance of evil form one high point at the beginning, while redemption through *tikkun olam* is the high point of the end. The existence and origin of evil can become one talking point, while redemption becomes a second such point of entrée. While the traditional Jewish narrative focuses on the present and on following the *halakha* in daily life, here the focus is on the trajectory from problem to solution, from evil (on a cosmic scale, so more than just human sin) to redemption.

Here we can engage by first asking about the nature of evil. The radical nature of evil can be presented via:

Everyone has turned away, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one. (Ps 53:3 [Hebrew, 53:4])

Hear, O heavens! Listen, O earth! For the LORD has spoken: "I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me. The ox knows his master, the donkey his owner's manger, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand. Ah, sinful nation, a people loaded with guilt, a brood of evildoers, children given to corruption! They have forsaken the LORD; they have spurned the Holy One of Israel and turned their backs on him. Why should you be beaten anymore? Why do you persist in rebellion? Your whole head is injured, your whole heart afflicted. From the sole of your foot to the top of your head there is no soundness—only wounds and welts and open sores, not cleansed or bandaged or soothed with oil." (Isa 1:2–6)<sup>23</sup>

Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil. (Jer 13:23)

On the redemption end, the discussion can move into whether we are indeed capable of bringing about *tikkun olam* through the performance of *mitzvot*. Or must something more radical happen? The above verses already suggest that there is something deeper about human behavior, that it is not simply a matter of choosing the *yetzer hatov* over the *yetzer hara*. The radical solution can then be discussed with, say, Isaiah 53, and the need for the radical death of the Messiah to atone for sin. We can once again go to the New Testament and compare:

You see, at just the right time, when we were still *powerless* [other translations, *helpless*], Messiah died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Messiah died for us. (Rom 5:6–8)

Is it then possible that we do not have the power to keep the *mitzvot*, at least not to the extent needed to bring about *tikkun olam*?

A similar thought is expressed in:

As for you, you were *dead* in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, *made us alive* with Messiah even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. (Eph 2:1–5)

<sup>23</sup> Here and elsewhere I have condensed the poetry into prose form to save space. Most translations will show the rendering in poetic strophes.



No, we cannot keep *mitzvot* sufficiently to merit salvation:

I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Messiah died for nothing! (Gal 2:21)

It is important to emphasize that this does not in any way denigrate the Torah itself; but we cannot effectively keep the commandments in order to bring about *tikkun olam*. Ultimate redemption is effected only by God, through His Messiah. We can discuss the following messianic passage in that light:

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this. (Isa 9:6–7 [Hebrew, 9:5–6])

Moreover, we can affirm the cosmic scope of redemption which is also underscored in the Lurianic Kabbalistic narrative. That is to say, there is far more to the New Testament narrative than simply "trust Jesus and your sins are forgiven."

But each in his own turn: Messiah, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. (1 Cor 15:23–26)

We could even move into the verses showing that Yeshua is the divine incarnation of the God of Israel, as a way to emphasize the equivalence of the Old and New Testaments, and use New Testament verses showing that God Himself effects salvation. And as a final suggestion, we can also talk about the "raising of the sparks," a central aspect of the scheme of redemption in Lurianic Kabbalah, and compare it to the raising of Yeshua from the dead! Our use of messianic prophecy here will center on the implications that God is the one who saves, not our own efforts.

### **3. The Secular Liberal Jewish Metanarrative**

Here, the high point of the narrative is eventual human perfection, a hope still held by techno-utopians; even in the postmodern world, utopia is not dead. In the classic view, human ethical efforts bring in this perfected world; today, more likely, one will encounter the idea that technology will bring in a kind of (secular) millennium. In Jewish circles, nevertheless, there remains a strong rootedness in prophetic ethics and Jewish core values.



Therefore, the approach here can focus on ethics alongside questioning the idea of perpetual progress. As far as ethics are concerned, Jewish core values abound in the New Testament, whether we are talking about doing *zedaka*, avoiding *lashon hara*, or showing *kibbud av va-em*.<sup>24</sup> One entrée here is to point to the ethical aspect of the messianic hope as represented in a passage such as Isaiah 11:1–4:

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD—and he will delight in the fear of the LORD. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.

One can then speak of the ethics of Jesus—at one time a well-traversed topic among classical, liberal Jewish writers, who admired the ethics of Jesus minus the “Christian” trappings. Does he represent a high ethic, such that if He were a synagogue member today, He would be admired? (Prepare for the counter arguments such as Jesus’ ethically “questionable” act of cursing the fig tree or passages that use exaggeration and Hebrew idiom in reference to “hating” your mother and father.) If so, what then can we say about a person of such high ethics who makes other radical claims about Himself?

In this connection, the idea of progress by technology, or by other means, must also be addressed. A comparison of Old Testament and modern history can help someone appreciate the viewpoint that mankind is not getting incrementally better; a technological utopia is not necessarily a moral one.<sup>25</sup> We can ask why biblical writers would pen verses such as the following and what in their experience counted against the idea of steady progress.

You have done *more evil* than all who lived before you. You have made for yourself other gods, idols made of metal; you have provoked me to anger and thrust me behind your back. (1 Kgs 14:9)

Ahab son of Omri did *more evil* in the eyes of the LORD than any of those before him. (1 Kgs 16:30)

24 Respectively, deeds of charity, avoidance of evil talk, and honor of father and mother.

25 Compare the dystopias of Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* and George Orwell’s *1984*—or any number of dystopic films and novels. More recently, see, e.g., the novel and film adaptation of Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*.

But the people did not listen. Manasseh led them astray, so that they did *more evil* than the nations the LORD had destroyed before the Israelites. (2 Kgs 21:9)

Manasseh king of Judah has committed these detestable sins. He has done *more evil* than the Amorites who preceded him and has led Judah into sin with his idols. (2 Kgs 21:11)

But Manasseh led Judah and the people of Jerusalem astray, so that they did *more evil* than the nations the LORD had destroyed before the Israelites. (2 Chron 33:9)

Even taking hyperbole into account in these verses, the history of Israel in the Old Testament is clearly not one of continual moral gains. Exactly the opposite is depicted: it ended in exile as evil, and sin “accumulated.” In modern times, first World War I and then the Holocaust undermined belief in inevitable progress. H. G. Wells’ change in attitude is well known, as reflected in his written statements: from unbridled optimism to profound despair—and this over a period of only some nine years!<sup>26</sup>

At the same time, we must speak into this narrative by affirming the rightness of doing good things. It is good and right to work for social justice, a green planet, and so on. Nevertheless, the point of challenge is that this is a different matter than expecting evolutionary progress to culminate in utopia. Therefore, it can become very relevant to speak about the messianic prophecies which show that the Messiah comes to solve a problem we have, the problem of sin. Only when that problem is resolved will the Messiah return to usher in a utopian age.

#### **4. The Classical Secular Zionist Metanarrative**

Israel today is no longer the young, idealistic nation of its first decades. Nevertheless, in spite of a loss of idealism, the narrative is still with us that the establishment of Israel was of supreme importance to the history of the Jewish people, entailing as it did the first independent Jewish homeland since Rome conquered Judea in 63 BCE. Underlying this narrative, there is still the thought that our history has been one of oppression,<sup>27</sup> and that

26 Often quoted from *A Short History of the World* (1937): “Can we doubt that presently our race will more than realize our boldest imaginations, that it will achieve unity and peace, and that our children will live in a world made more splendid and lovely than any palace or garden that we know, going on from strength to strength in an ever-widening circle of achievement? What man has done, the little triumphs of his present state . . . form but the prelude to the things that man has yet to do” (Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* [New York: Riverhead Books, 2008], 165).

And from *A Mind at the End of Its Tether* (1946): “The cold-blooded massacres of the defenseless, the return of deliberate and organized torture, mental torment, and fear to a world from which such things had seemed well nigh banished—has come near to breaking my spirit altogether. . . . ‘Homo sapiens,’ as he has been pleased to call himself, is played out” (Keller, 165).

27 What Jewish historian Salo Baron referred to as the “lachrymose conception of Jewish history.” Baron took exception to portraying Jewish history solely in terms of persecution.



defending Jewish survival—from both external and internal threats, e.g., a nuclear Iran and intermarriage—remains paramount on the Jewish agenda.

In this narrative, the high point is 1948, and we can add a lesser high point at the time of the Maccabees. Therefore, our point of entrée is the idea of Jewish survival, as promised and guaranteed by God Himself, with that survival sustained in the Messiah Jesus who came first to Israel with a Jewish message—which, however, pertained to non-Jews as well, by design. Here we can talk about messianic passages such as the classic verses:

The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." (Gen 12:1–3)

This establishes that the Jewish people were not an accident of history but a divine institution, and also establishes the idea, potentially troubling to those who want to ensure Israel's survival, that the nations of the world were from the very start intended to share in Israel's blessings.

In this connection we have another often-cited passage:

This is what the LORD says, he who appoints the sun to shine by day, who decrees the moon and stars to shine by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar—the LORD Almighty is his name: "Only if these decrees vanish from my sight," declares the LORD, "will the descendants of Israel ever cease to be a nation before me." This is what the LORD says: "Only if the heavens above can be measured and the foundations of the earth below be searched out will I reject all the descendants of Israel because of all they have done," declares the LORD. (Jer 31:35–37)

We note that the passage about the new covenant immediately precedes this passage. Jewish followers of Jesus believe that He ushered in exactly this new covenant. How then, we can ask, can entering Jeremiah's new covenant mean the destruction of the Jewish people? The new covenant appears to dovetail with Jewish preservation in Jeremiah.

We can then, once more, open the New Testament and ask questions relevant to this metanarrative:

He [Jesus] told them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to *all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.*" (Luke 24:46–47)

The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "*All nations will*



be blessed through you.” So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. (Gal 3:8–9)

How can we reconcile the value of Jewish survival in a world of hostile nations with the idea, stretching from Abraham to Jesus, that the nations are meant to embrace the God of Israel and His Messiah?

Moreover, God’s commitment to the Jewish people is reflected—even fulfilled—by these New Testament attitudes:

I speak the truth in Messiah—I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit—I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Messiah for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen. (Rom 9:1–5)

I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I make much of my ministry in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them. For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? If the part of the dough offered as first-fruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; if the root is holy, so are the branches. If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, do not boast over those branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, “Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in.” Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid. For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either. Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off. And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree! I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: “The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins.” (Rom 11:13–27)

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. (Matt 23:37)

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Praise be to the Lord, *the God of Israel*, because he has come and has redeemed *his people*. (Luke 1:68)

## Conclusion

The above scenarios are meant to emphasize the need to speak the gospel, including messianic prophecy, into the particular worldviews or metanarratives of our listeners. In that way, the narrative of Scripture challenges the various other narratives that compete for a hearing. Because the messianic hope is part of the larger scriptural narrative, opening up the scriptural narrative at key points that resonate with our listeners enables us to present that hope, generally and in terms of specific verses, in an organic and meaningful way.

Proverbs 25:11 tells us, “A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver.” To somewhat change the image, if Scripture is our gold, our presentation is the setting. I hope these suggestions can encourage us to creatively make our settings of silver, so that the eternal gold of the gospel can shine brightly through.





## Jesus the Messiah\*

by **Herbert W. Bateman, IV**

Without question, Jesus is an unsurpassed, certainly an unequaled, figure in human history. Belief in His life, death, and resurrection has transformed and even redirected world empires, cultures, and people. No one person has ever affected the world and its history like Jesus. And though the principle sources of information regarding Jesus' life and teachings are the Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—Jesus has been the subject of personal and public letters, sermons and lectures, pamphlets and books, skits and plays, and documentaries and movies. Identification with Him can bring both positive and negative responses. Jesus can be both endearing and repelling. Thus, Jesus has been, and continues to be, a worthy person to ponder. *Jesus the Messiah: Tracing the Promises, Expectations, and Coming of Israel's King* is yet another presentation about Jesus—more specifically, a consideration of His messiahship: Who is Jesus, the Messiah?

Naturally, our book about the messianic Jesus is not totally unique. People appear to ponder and write about Jesus and His messiahship all the time. Visit the religion section of any major bookstore, and you will see an array of books about Jesus. Surprisingly, every book seems to have a different slant on Jesus. Some, for instance, do not consider Jesus' claim to be Messiah and even minimize His Jewishness. They view Him primarily through Greco–Roman lenses. For example, John Dominic Crossan creates a portrait of Jesus that envisions Him as a Mediterranean Jewish peasant and cynic, who lived like other itinerate cynics roaming the Greco–Roman world.<sup>1</sup> Jesus is, according to Crossan and a few others, a radical individual who advocates the avoidance of worldly entanglements and defies social conventions. His connection with His Jewish roots is clearly diminished.

\* Used by permission of Herbert W. Bateman, IV. This article is an adaptation of the introduction to the book authored by Herbert Bateman IV, Darrell L. Bock, and Gordon H. Johnston, *Jesus the Messiah: Tracing the Promises, Expectations, and Coming of Israel's King* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, forthcoming).

1 John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991). For other works and advocates of this view, see Appendix A in *Jesus the Messiah*.



Others acknowledge Jesus' Jewishness but appear to ignore or reject His role as Messiah. He is a Jewish, but non-messianic, figure whose sole interest is social or religious reform. On the one hand, Gerd Theissen, Richard A. Horsley, and R. David Kaylor emphasize Jesus as a Jewish social reformer. On the other hand, E. P. Sanders, Geza Vermes, and Marcus Borg portray Him as a religious reformer. Thus, Jesus is some sort of Jewish reformer, yet non-messianic. Although His Jewishness is recognized, His claim to be "Messiah" is minimized.

#### Jesus: A Jewish Non-Messianic Reformer

<b>Social Reformer</b>	<b>Major Proponent with a Selected Work</b>
Jesus: Radical, charismatic, itinerant preacher of social reform	Gerd Theissen: <i>The Shadow of the Galilean</i> (1987)
Jesus: Peasant prophet for radical social change	Richard A. Horsley: <i>Jesus and the Spiral of Violence</i> (1987)
Jesus: Political prophet for social reform	R. David Kaylor: <i>Jesus the Prophet</i> (1994)
<b>Religious Reformer</b>	<b>Major Proponent with a Selected Work</b>
Jesus: Prophet of a Jewish eschatological restoration	E. P. Sanders: <i>The Historical Figure of Jesus</i> (1993)
Jesus: Charismatic Jew	Geza Vermes: <i>The Religion of Jesus and the World of Judaism</i> (1984)
Jesus: Charismatic, healer, sage, and prophet for social change	Marcus Borg: <i>Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time</i> (1994)

Still others portray Jesus as a Jewish Messiah, and yet ponder His messiahship. Numerous authors fall into this category. On the one hand, some stress that Jesus is a messianic prophet. Dale C. Allison, Maurice Casey, Bart D. Ehrman, and John P. Meier portray Jesus as a prophet who speaks primarily about the future millennium or kingdom. Yet, Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza and Ben Witherington III spotlight Jesus as a messianic sage, a teaching Messiah who speaks on many issues. On the other hand, N. T. Wright prefers to speak of Jesus as a Jewish Messiah of restoration. He is the one who will lead the nation of Israel out of exile. Others like Marcus Bockmuehl, Marcus de Jonge, and Peter Stuhlmacher underscore various aspects of His messianic sonship, namely whether that sonship is Davidic, human, or divine.

### Jesus: A Jewish Messiah Figure<sup>2</sup>

<b>Messianic Prophet</b>	<b>Major Proponent with a Selected Work</b>
Jesus: The millennium prophet	Dale C. Allison: <i>Jesus of Nazareth: Millenarian Prophet</i> (1998)
Jesus: Eschatological or apocalyptic prophet	Maurice Casey: <i>From Jewish Prophet to Gentile God</i> (1991) Bart D. Ehrman: <i>Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet</i> (2001)
Jesus: Eschatological prophet who ushers in the kingdom of God	John P. Meier: <i>A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus</i> , 4 vols. (1991, 1994, 2001, 2009)
<b>Messianic Sage</b>	<b>Major Proponent with a Selected Work</b>
Jesus: Egalitarian sage	Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza: <i>Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet; Critical Issues in Feminist Christology</i> (1994)
Jesus: Prophetic and eschatological sage	Ben Witherington III: <i>Jesus the Sage: The Pilgrimage of Wisdom</i> (1994)
<b>Messianic Restorer</b>	<b>Major Proponent with a Selected Work</b>
Jesus: Eschatological Messiah who leads Israel out of exile	N. T. Wright, <i>Jesus and the Victory of God</i> (1996)
<b>Messianic Son</b>	<b>Major Proponent with a Selected Work</b>
Jesus: Serving Son of David	Marcus de Jonge: <i>Jesus, the Servant Messiah</i> (1991)
Jesus: Martyred Son of Man	Markus Bockmuehl: <i>This Jesus: Martyr, Lord, Messiah</i> (1994)
Jesus: Divine Son of Man	Peter Stuhlmacher: <i>Jesus of Nazareth—Christ of Faith</i> (1993)

Naturally, many of the proposed portraits of Jesus as a Jewish Messiah have merit; some do not. While some strive to distance Jesus from His Jewish roots, others recognize and embrace those roots. Those who minimize Jesus' connection with His Jewishness and His cultural connection of His messiahship via the Old Testament have limited value. For instance, some may claim that the identity of Jesus, His messiahship, and the nature of His redemptive work was God's well-hidden mystery from ages past and only *first clearly revealed in Jesus* by His death, resurrection, and ascension. Jesus, it is pointed out, confided only to His inner circle that His true identity and the nature of His mission was a divine secret—concealed from others, but revealed to them. Some lay inappropriate stress on Paul's assertion that the true nature of Jesus and His messianic mission was a divine mystery, hid-

2 For an overview and bibliography for each view, see Appendix A in the book.



den from all ages past and only revealed by the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. These sorts of claims not only underestimate, but they also fail to fully appreciate, a connection with the Old Testament, and thereby negate the element of progression in the revelation, evident in the Old Testament prophecies about the “Messiah.” Consequently, many of these scholars underscore the capacity and creative work of human authors of Scripture and downplay and perhaps even disregard God’s overarching involvement in redemptive history. We, however, do not.

Although this book neither critiques nor contributes *directly* to the selection of books listed above, we do ponder the same question: Who is Jesus, the Messiah? So in that sense, there is some connection to the works introduced above. However, the scope of investigation in *Jesus the Messiah: Tracing the Promises, Expectations, and Coming of Israel’s King* is much broader, in that it traces God’s promise of Messiah as first presented in the Hebrew Scriptures, then reflected upon during the *latter portion* of the Second Temple period (often referred to as the “Intertestamental Period”), and finally fulfilled in the coming of Jesus.

## Foundations of Our Approach

*Jesus the Messiah: Tracing the Promises, Expectations, and Coming of Israel’s King* offers contextual-canonical, messianic, and christological developments of God’s promise of “Messiah” within the larger framework and unfolding of Jewish history in canonical and extra-biblical literature. Naturally, the foundation upon which we build is what Christians today call “the Old Testament.” The books of “the Old Testament” were part of what was regarded by many Jews in Jesus’ time as the sacred writings of their community. Our appeal to a canonical reading here, however, is distinct from its usual meaning today, which assumes a reading with the New Testament present. Consequently, when the books of the New Testament were being written, the New Testament, as a collection of writings, did not yet exist.<sup>3</sup> So when someone asks, “What Scriptures were read by those who wrote in the first century?” the answer would be, “the Hebrew writings of the Jews.” Their canonical and inspired works were the Hebrew Scriptures; what we Christians today call the Old Testament.

So in this book, *as a historical matter*, the term “canonical” refers to a reading that uses the sacred books of the First Testament or Hebrew Scrip-

<sup>3</sup> The earliest extant collection of the New Testament is found in p46 (ca. 200 CE), which includes most of Paul’s writings and the book of Hebrews. The first extant manuscript to include all twenty-seven books of the New Testament is Sinaiticus (fourth century CE). It was Marcion (ca. 140 CE), the heretic, who compiled the very first “canonical” collection of New Testament works, which he limited to ten of Paul’s writings and Luke’s Gospel. The Muratorian Canon (ca. 160–80 CE) contains all twenty-seven books of the New Testament. The point is simply this: when people were wrestling with Jesus as Messiah, the only “canonical” Testament they had was the Hebrew Scriptures. So, *we must be willing to travel back to a time* when the Old Testament canon of Scripture had yet to be *formally fixed* and the theological developments we find in the New Testament concerning God’s kingdom and God’s Messiah were *not yet fully realized*.

tures, whether being read in the first century or even during the period when the First Testament was being completed. This is an important distinction to grasp, because for us, it is here in the Hebrew Scriptures that any canonical reading, even in the broader sense used today of both Testaments, starts. In other words, when a person from the first century, or earlier, saw any of these theologically respected books depicting the promise of Israel and their hope, we will ask this question: How were passages of promise read in light of the whole, while at the same time taking into account developments of promise within that First Testament? This is precisely how we will use the term canonical, while also recognizing that today the canon Christians acknowledge contains a Second Testament (the New Testament) that completes the messianic picture. Thus, a significant point of our book is to argue how this portrait of Messiah presented in both Testaments is gradually unfolded, yielding a *more* complete canonical portrait.

So we first ask and then respond to the following questions: How did the First Testament portray the promise of Messiah? Was the portrait of the Messiah in the individual texts as explicit and clear to the original readers as it became later in the Psalms and the Prophets, or as a part of Jesus' work? Or was the full messianic potential of many passages more implicit, especially in the earliest passages, while the full legitimate messianic meaning of these passages only became more explicit as more elements of this promise were revealed in later passages and subsequent Jewish history, whether from the First Testament or as a result of Jesus' own revelatory work? Does the First Testament reveal christological clarity at the moment each text was introduced?

Our answer is: "Yes, *eventually* a clear portrait emerges, but each inspired text is but a piece of a much larger puzzle in which the entire portrait gains clarity as the other inspired pieces are assembled, granting more

**"Yes, *eventually* a clear portrait emerges, but each inspired text is but a piece of a much larger puzzle in which the entire portrait gains clarity as the other inspired pieces are assembled, granting more clarity to what initially was often only *implicitly visible* within a given literary piece."**

clarity to what initially was often only *implicitly visible* within a given literary piece." The promise was in the original wording, as we hope to show, but it also became gradually connected to other texts of promise and pattern as they were revealed, reflecting back on the earlier text and giving it more context and clarity. Scripture assembles its doctrine as God inspires human authors to write it. God does not disclose everything at once, especially at the start. Seeing Scripture reveal itself progressively and with more detail and clarity is something the church has consistently affirmed.

Thus, we seek to set forth one methodological model for how that progressive unfolding works and to show God's intentionality behind it. For the sake of illustration, the progress of messianic revelation is like pieces of a puzzle, a messianic puzzle of promise.



## Puzzle Pieces of Messianic Promise

God provides pieces of the messianic puzzle very early in Jewish history. In the book of Genesis, God expresses it as a hope to Abraham with links to ideas of the seed that go back to Adam, expressed initially in general terms.<sup>4</sup> That same promise is given specifics in 2 Samuel, when God provides assurances to David about his descendants. Unfortunately, these sacred writings (the Old Testament) close with no one on David's throne due to Nebuchadnezzar's invasion of Judah in 586 BCE, when David's dynasty is dismantled.<sup>5</sup> Yet, the prophets provide glimmers of hope for its restoration (e.g., Amos, Micah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Zechariah). This revelation progresses in the early sacred texts, as the book of Daniel makes clear. One day, a human figure (the Son of Man) comes with divine authority to establish God's kingdom and vindicate God's saints, completing the initial canonical picture of the hope of deliverance for God's people (Dan 2, 7, 9). Who exactly this figure was, where He fit, and how He connected to other pictures of deliverance opened up a discussion, along with a host of views, in Judaism that, through our survey of the extra-biblical Jewish literature, we shall show fueled the first-century conversation about messianic hope.<sup>6</sup> Unlike those who underestimate or perhaps even reject the significance of Hebrew Scriptures for understanding Jesus the Messiah, our starting point is the Hebrew Scriptures, because the sacred writings of the First Testament provide the essential pieces of a scriptural puzzle about Messiah that need to be joined and fitted together.

During the latter part of the Second Temple period (ca. 100 BCE), people collected, pondered, and pieced together this messianic puzzle. Although some people appear indifferent (e.g., Ben Sirach and Josephus), others reflect on the scriptural puzzle and attempt to fit the pieces together (e.g., the Qumran community). Gradually more and more scriptural pieces were linked together in a variety of configurations, some of which the early Christians used and others which they rejected. The confusion these opin-

4 The christocentric interpretation of Genesis 3:15, known as the *Proto-Evangelion*, enjoys a long tradition among Christian interpreters. Yet, it tends to be understood in one of two ways: (1) it is the first hint of the gospel as the seed of the woman will be victorious over the forces of evil, which the serpent represents, namely, Satan; and (2) there is no real hint of the gospel in the text. Whereas the first sees the most direct messianic fulfillment, the second merely introduces the conflict and the curse as a result of Eve's disobedience, and thereby sees no real messianism, nor messianic implication, in the text. Due to these diverse perspectives, we deal with the passage in an appendix in the book.

5 Regarding our use of BC-AD or BCE-CE, we have opted to use the latter. The practice began to change in the eighties, and now, the use of BCE-CE tends to be the common practice in nearly all current biblical and Second Temple studies.

6 Why use the term "extra-biblical Jewish literature"? I prefer "Second Temple documents," but it lacks the needed separation from the New Testament canonical works. So, after some consideration, the description "extra-biblical" was adopted to communicate that later Second Temple texts of what is often called the intertestamental period are not read as inspired texts. Nevertheless, they contribute to the messianic ideas that are in play during Jesus' lifetime and during the time His followers write. Yet another good option, used by Craig Evans, is "noncanonical." Craig A. Evans, *Noncanonical Writings and New Testament Interpretation* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1992).



ions introduced, as well as some of the helpful connections they saw in the Jewish sacred texts, is part of the early Christian conversation about Messiah and why Jesus handles the category of Messiah with as much care as He does. So by the time of Jesus, key elements were in place to make a unity of it all—something Jesus and the early church presented as a grand fusion of what God had said in Scripture and accomplished in Jesus. Jesus' teaching, life, death, resurrection, and ascension, therefore, complete the messianic puzzle.<sup>7</sup> Yet, having demonstrated that the foundation of our approach begins with the Hebrew Scriptures, and thereby considers continuity with the New Testament, we might ask: "How does our approach differ from other approaches that also begin with the Old Testament?"

### Differentiating Our Approach

Granted, our starting point is not unlike other approaches that acknowledge the value of the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) when discussing Messiah. Yet, there is a difference. Many people today unfortunately fail to grapple with the human journey of discovery about "Messiah." Many preachers who preach sermons about Jesus, who is the Messiah, often overemphasize their theological system, with limited or even no consideration of any progress of revelation in human history. Others may read the text historically, often looking exclusively to the long-term reality. But in their quest for a singular, historical-contextual meaning throughout all of Scripture, they argue that what an Old Testament human author said about Messiah *equals* that which is stated about Jesus the Messiah in the New Testament.<sup>8</sup> They tend to suggest that Jesus and the apostles assert that the Hebrew Scriptures testify *directly* and (or more importantly) *exclusively* about Him. In their minds, the evangelists and the authors of the epistles believe Moses foretold *only* the death of Jesus the Messiah; David foresaw *only* the resurrection of Jesus the Messiah; Isaiah predicted *only* Jesus' ascension into glory; and Abraham heard *only* the gospel to the Gentiles preached by Him.<sup>9</sup> Thus, they stress the work of the divine

7 Darrell L. Bock first used the puzzle metaphor in "A Progressive Dispensational Hermeneutic," in *Three Central Issues in Contemporary Dispensationalism: A Comparison of Traditional and Progressive Views*, ed. Herbert W. Bateman IV (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), 85–101; and "Single Meaning, Multiple Contexts and Referents," in *Three Views on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. Kenneth Berding and Jonathan Lunde (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 105–51.

8 See Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "The Single Intent of Scripture," in *Evangelical Roots: A Tribute to Wilbur Smith*, ed. Kenneth S. Kantzer (Nashville: Nelson, 1978), 123–41; *The Uses of the Old Testament in the New* (Chicago: Moody, 1985); and "Single Meaning, Unified Referents," in *Three Views on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. Kenneth Berding and Jonathan Lunde (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 45–89; Elliott E. Johnson, "A Traditional Dispensational Hermeneutic," in *Three Central Issues in Contemporary Dispensationalism*, 63–76; John H. Sailhamer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology: A Canonical Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995). For another discussion about Sailhamer see footnote 12 below.

9 As Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart note, "The primary difficulty for most modern readers of the Prophets stems from an inaccurate prior understanding of the word 'prophecy.' For most people this word means the same as the first definition in most



author and thereby overemphasize an *unambiguous continuity* between the Testaments. The idea is that most or all of these texts need to be direct prophecies in order for Jesus to be the messianic fulfillment in the way the New Testament describes. Thus the argument is this: Jesus the Messiah is *explicitly present* very early on, in a model that, more often than not, argues for direct prophecy in many specific Old Testament texts, often exclusively directed at Jesus. There is but one single, *unambiguous* meaning concerning Messiah, and all authors, human and divine, are unified as to who that referent is. Clearly, they argue, He is Jesus.<sup>10</sup>

We, however, will offer a slightly different approach. Granted, there is most certainly a link, but we will argue that it is not a *completely exclusive one*. One of our goals is to argue that these texts do not need to be direct prophecies for them to reveal a messianic connection and fulfillment in Jesus. Such an *explicit-exclusive* reading of the First Testament tends to ignore the complexities of Jewish history, as well as God's revelation and its progress. Such an explicit reading deprives us of historical information that ultimately helps us grasp what was going on in the lives of the Jewish people, and what God's revelation told them about their present and future. While a traditional approach argues for *explicit predictions* about Jesus, we suggest that while the wording is *ultimately* messianic, it is often more *implicitly stated* and becomes clearer *only* as the entirety of God's portrait of Messiah is eventually and fully disclosed, both by how the First Testament concludes and by what Jesus Himself does to pull all the messianic pieces together.<sup>11</sup> What we mean to convey is simply this: *not all prophecy is exclusively pointing to Jesus, just ultimately*. Such a reading alerts us to the noteworthy reality of the dynamic nature of *pattern* and *prophecy* in Scripture, its progressive nature of revelation, and its various longitudinal trajectories across human history. Reading Old Testament texts as though

dictionaries: 'Foretelling or prediction of what is to come.' It often happens, therefore, that many Christians refer to the prophetic books only for predictions about the coming of Jesus and/or certain features of the New Covenant age—as though prediction of events far distant from their own day was the main concern of the prophets. In fact, using the Prophets in this way is highly selective. Consider the following statistics: 'Less than 2 percent of Old Testament prophecy is messianic. Less than 5 percent specifically describes the New Covenant age. Less than 1 percent concerns events yet to come' (Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book: A Guided Tour* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993], 165–66).

- 10 For a presentation and evaluation of four evangelical approaches to the use of the Old Testament in the New Testament see Darrell L. Bock, "Evangelicals and the Use of the Old Testament in the New: Part 1," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 142 (July–September 1985): 209–23; "Evangelicals and the Use of the Old Testament in the New: Part 2," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 142 (October–December 1985): 206–19.
- 11 See Wolter H. Rose, "Messiah," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 565–68. Sydney Greidanus, in *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament* ([Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999], 276), suggests seven different ways of preaching Christ from the Old Testament: "redemptive-historical progression, promise-fulfillment, typology, analogy, longitudinal themes, New Testament references, and contrast." Rather than simply referring to "messianic prophecies" in general, it is helpful to point out that there are numerous ways in which the Old Testament paves the way for the recognition of Jesus as Israel's Deliverer, Hope, and Messiah.

they are exclusively about Jesus ignores the prefiguring portraits that are also significant pieces of the puzzle, which have to be both recognized and appreciated as we look from this side of Jesus' resurrection and exaltation.

Another way to say this is that we arrive at the same conclusion as these more traditional readings, in terms of their being fulfilled in Jesus, but we take a different route to get there. The method we propose honors the clues in the original texts and aspects of their original meaning for

**We have chosen to pause, ponder, and present God's gradual disclosure of His kingdom program, preserved in God's inspired Scripture and written by people living in the midst of, and wrestling with, divinely directed historical events.**

the near historical context in which they were written. In essence, we have chosen to pause, ponder, and present God's gradual disclosure of His kingdom program, preserved in God's inspired Scripture and written by people living in the midst of, and wrestling with, divinely directed historical events. Thus we adopt a threefold reading strategy of Scripture that is first contextual-canonical, then messianic, and finally christological.

## Defining Our Approach

As noted above, our commitment is to neither underestimate nor overemphasize the connection between the two testaments. In order to follow through with that desire, we read the text first as contextual-canonical, then messianic, and finally christological. So what does this all mean? By contextual-canonical, we mean how the earliest testament, in part and in whole, generated such promises in the context of the progress of revelation. By messianic, we mean how these messianic options were being contemplated by Jews as we enter the time of Jesus. We mean messianic reflection here. The choice of "messianic" here does not mean there was no messianic hope coming out of the First Testament, because it is the messianic and eschatological hope of that testament that is generating the various views. Nor will we say that all these Jewish options are of equal value. Some of them were a part of the early Christian discussion and others were rejected by them. By christological, we mean how Jesus and the earliest church put all of this together into a coherent portrait that they also saw as revelatory about the promise, as they entered into the debate over the various options, affirming some elements, rejecting others, and adding fresh emphases of their own. The burden of this book is the demonstration of this threefold reading strategy as fundamental for making sense of Jesus' and the early church's messianic claim.

Concerning the *promises* of Israel's king (covered in part one of the book), we address the contextual-canonical reading of the First Testament.<sup>12</sup> In a

<sup>12</sup> Due to similar terminology, some might erroneously link Gordon Johnston's approach with that of John H. Sailhamer. However, Sailhamer merges contextual and canonical into a single reading and, thereby, argues for a fully developed messianic eschatology.



contextual reading, the interpreter seeks to understand the First Testament passage in its original historical setting. This is an important first, and often neglected, step when discussing God's promise of Messiah in the Hebrew Scriptures. Here, we are especially concentrating on what the original human author meant and understood in his original, historical setting. Furthermore, we focus on the exegetical meaning of a passage within its immediate theological and literary context. Thus, we read the passage as an ancient Hebrew might, in the light of his historical background, antecedent theology, and literary context. At the same time, we also pay attention to how the wording of God's promises has potential for development over a longer term.

In a canonical reading, the interpreter takes into account the progress of revelation. Although every passage has a particular referential meaning in its original context, many biblical themes are not static, but dynamic, in the gradual historical unfolding of Scripture. In the progress of biblical revelation, God develops theological themes across time and in history. In other words, in a canonical reading we consider our passage from the perspective of a wider context—the final canonical form of the Hebrew Scriptures.

The focus on the First Testament as a whole, and the unfolding of its messianic portrait, will help to set up both what was discussed in the latter part of the Second Temple period (beginning ca. 167 BCE) and what Jesus did with all of these options as He assessed them. Initial statements made by human authors allow the principle of God's design and activity to be appealed to again, at a later historical moment. Patterns of application of God's promise become clearer as salvation history unfolds in the sacred texts and as the patterns described in earlier texts reappear. Some prophets had the strong sense that whatever was happening to kingship in their time (and not all of it was good, by any means) would not stop God from accomplishing what He had promised. They knew that in the *eschaton* there would be a decisive deliverance. Later, when we read the same passages, we attempt to do so as though we were a Jew living during the early Second Temple (post-exilic) period (e.g., Genesis in light of the Psalms and Prophets, not just as a book on its own). Thus, we strive to draw on the understanding of messianic themes as they stood at the time of a later Jewish reading in Israel's history.

Concerning the *expectations* of Israel's king (covered in part two of the book), we focus attention on reflections about messianic promise evident in later, extra-biblical Jewish writings. Jewish interpreters read, explained, pieced together, and applied sacred texts within a later, Second Temple

Johnston, however, does not. Johnston clearly distinguishes the original contextual meaning from the later canonical significance (e.g., Brevard Childs). Thus, Johnston does not merge the two into a single reading. Furthermore, Sailhamer articulates his view in an article entitled "Hosea 11:1 and Matthew 2:15" (*Westminster Theological Journal* 63 [2001]: 87–96), but Dan McCartney and Peter Enns believe Sailhamer has misread Brevard Childs, that he is incorrect in arguing that (1) Hosea 11:1 is explicitly messianic; (2) the Pentateuch contains a fully developed messianic eschatology; and (3) Matthew limited himself to a strict grammatical-historical exegesis of Hosea. See "Matthew and Hosea: A Response to John Sailhamer," *Westminster Theological Journal* 63 (2001): 97–105.

context (ca. 167 BCE–70 CE). This involved interpretive, theological, and hermeneutical reflections that emerged during, and possibly as a result of, major historical events: the rebuilding of the second temple (515 BCE), the desecration and rededication of the second temple (167, 164 BCE), the rise and fall of the Hasmonean dynasty, which ruled Israel (143–63 BCE), etc. Although there remains a mysterious element about God's messianic promise, namely what and who was to come, some Jewish interpreters occasionally got it right in that they put some aspects of the messianic portrait together in helpful ways. They understood that Old Testament trajectories could be interpreted as *ultimately* pointing to an eschatological Messiah.

Extra-biblical Jewish literature composed during the intertestamental period, along with their numerous interpretations and reflections on theological themes in the sacred Hebrew writings, heighten the continuity and discontinuity between the Testaments. Open-ended prophecies in the sacred texts are elaborated in extra-biblical materials, sometimes consistently producing a unified portrait—and at other times making a unity hard to find. And though extra-biblical Jewish literature authored around the time of Jesus is not Scripture, nor is it inspired, it does inform us of early Jewish theological beliefs and expectations, as well as provide us with examples of hermeneutical approaches to the First Testament that support those belief systems about various eschatological messiah figures.<sup>13</sup>

Concerning the *coming* of Israel's king (covered in part three of the book), we address christological readings of the Old Testament. In a christological approach, we look at the messianic portrait again, but as a Christian, bringing scriptural hope together with the light of the ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, the Messiah. In some cases, passages are reused in ways that make their full force clear. In many cases, the messianic understanding is assumed as present by revelation and vindicated by God, so that the portrait is developed with a fullness and clarity that it had lacked, but now can be seen to have been there all along. In other words, we widen our context again—to Jesus and His inauguration of the new covenant. Here we discover both continuity and discontinuity with the variety of elements in early Jewish hope and with Second Temple Judaism. Pieces of the First Testament disclose the messianic identity and activity in Jesus' mission. Some of these elements were reflected upon and anticipated during the Second Temple period, but reaffirmed, unified, and fulfilled in the Second Testament.

So it should not come as a surprise that Second Temple interpretive approaches to the First Testament are often reflected in the Second Testament. Both Second Temple Jews and first-century Christians were trying to make sense of what God had said. This is certainly the case in Hebrews 1:5–13, where the author links seven Old Testament passages together to pres-

13 Herbert W. Bateman IV, "Second Temple Exegetical Practices: Extra-biblical Examples of Exegesis Compared with Those in the Book of Hebrews," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 53 (Fall 2010): 26–54.



ent Jesus as God's divine Davidic Son.<sup>14</sup> We may also say that apostolic readings of the Old Testament often connected new covenant truth with old covenant texts, making a revelatory step through the Spirit that brought together what had not yet been assembled into a coherent portrait. In doing so, they complete a unified picture with the earlier pieces. Sometimes the picture is completed in unanticipated ways, but nevertheless, in ways that show a single hope is at work. This is why we find Second Testament writers sometimes engaged in literal, contextual exegesis (*peshat*), but other times in what some argue wrongly is christological eisegesis (*midrash*). This is not, however, eisegesis because the text is being handled appropriately in light of additional revelation, namely, an inclusion of the original fullness of the First Testament along with what took place in Jesus, utilizing a larger historical and revelatory context. The difference is simply this: they are not dealing with exegesis of a specific book in its initial context alone, but rather performing exegesis across a collection of books, seeing God's Word as still active, alive, and speaking to the new historical setting.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, they are dealing with more than an individual verse. Instead they are dealing with theological concepts that appear throughout the Hebrew Scriptures and were reflected upon and written about during the latter part of the Second Temple period. Unlike traditional readings that argue for an explicit exegesis of specific passages in a singular context, we contend for a unified reading, involving canonical considerations of themes, reflections of which extend into the time of Jesus.

### Relevance of Our Approach

Needless to say, all three backgrounds (contextual-canonical introductions, messianic reflections, and christological conclusions of God's promise of "Messiah") are relevant to understanding how these texts ultimately are read and are a part of the historical process by which these passages came to be understood as affirming Jesus. No one approach trumps the others; *all three work in concert*, but in distinct ways. The First Testament sets the stage for the discussion, by introducing and presenting the promise, giving us many of its key revelatory elements. The messianic reflections are really a period of contemplating messianic options. They wrestle to make sense of all elements of these promises and put them together with varying degrees of success and failure. This period shows the variety of ways the Jewish audience of the first century might contemplate the topic, and

14 Herbert W. Bateman IV, "Two First Century Messianic Uses of the Old Testament: Hebrews 1:5–13 and 4QFlorilegium 1:1–19," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 38 (1995): 11–27; and "Psalm 45:6–7 and Its Christological Contributions to Hebrews," *Trinity Journal* n.s. 22 (2001): 3–21.

15 For other New Testament examples, see Steve Moyise, *The Old Testament in the New: An Introduction*, Continuum Biblical Studies Series (New York: Continuum, 2001); Richard N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999); Craig A. Evans, "The Function of the Old Testament in the New," in *Introducing New Testament Interpretation*, ed. Scot McKnight (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989); E. Earle Ellis, *Paul's Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957).

what options a messianic discussion of the first century needed to address. The time of a christological reading of Jesus and His followers renews the revelatory activity, missing since the early Testament, and puts the material together into a unit that also adds additional features and emphases to the portrait. Thus, we emphasize equally a contextual-canonical, messianic, and christological reading of the text. That means we neither underestimate Jesus' connection with His Jewishness and/or His cultural understandings of "Messiah" derived from the First Testament, nor do we simply make the conceptual connection of "Messiah" in the Old and New Testaments a mostly exclusive link. Herein lies the uniqueness of *Jesus the Messiah: Tracing the Promises, Expectations, and Coming of Israel's King*: we present a median approach to discovering who Jesus the Messiah is, and how Jesus Himself, in the progress of revelation, fits together the pieces of God's messianic puzzle.

Although initially, key elements about "Messiah" were often present only as *the culminating part of a more comprehensive discussion in the First Testament*, some promises were seen more clearly by later interpreters as more revelation appeared. In addition, some later reflections and presentations of various elements of the end times and the messianic portraits generated during the Second Temple period were often valuable. As historical events unfolded, a look back on earlier texts of Hebrew Scripture provided fresh elements that could make more explicit what had initially been only implicit. With the coming of Jesus, the fulfillment of these promises became unified and clear. Authors of the Second Testament, influenced by their historical milieu, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, proclaimed these fulfillments. Consequently, the Second Testament does not say less than the First Testament did, but it certainly tells us more about God's promise of "Messiah." Yet, God knew where these passages and patterns were going. As He revealed pieces of the messianic puzzle throughout history, God was well aware of how they would fit together. Our approach, therefore, represents a threefold hermeneutical reading strategy (periods of promise, expectation, and coming). It takes into consideration First Testament canonical texts and appropriate ancient Near Eastern material, Second Temple history, and Jewish literature of the period—as well as that of Jesus and the apostles.<sup>16</sup>

### **Our Threefold Approach**

We begin with an equal emphasis concerning the human author and the divine Author. We focus on kingship, because the anointed Deliverer is tied to a kingdom and the rule of a King. To be sure, other topics such as salvation and the *eschaton* also can, and do, have messianic meaning. However, the bulk of the key features about Messiah surface in claims tied

<sup>16</sup> This approach was initially described as "Jewish Background and Apostolic School" in "Dispensationalism Yesterday and Today," in *Three Central Issues in Contemporary Dispensationalism*, 40–42.





to kingship and kingdom. We intentionally restrict ourselves in this manner, because to expand the consideration into additional areas risks making our study far too large. So, we purposely concentrate on kingship and covenant texts. (This also helps to explain why Genesis 3:15 is treated as an appendix.<sup>17</sup>) What we find interesting is this: when we get to the time of Jesus and the early Christians, these other themes are often folded into the backdrop of kingship and Messiah, so not much is lost in our keeping this kingship as our primary focus. In our approach, dual authorships and their respective perspectives are important. On the one hand, *the human authors of Scripture record and disclose information about God within a context of human history*. The human authors have limited understanding of how God's ultimate goal will be played out (1 Pet 1:10–12; cp. Eph 3:5–7). Thus when they discuss the issue of "Messiah," they are not privy to, nor are they presented with, God's complete picture, but merely pieces of it.

On the other hand, the divine Author knows the beginning and the end of the story. But like any good author, *God gradually, progressively, reveals His messianic picture and builds it one piece* (i.e., one revelatory message) *at a time*, until Jesus and the Holy Spirit come and fit the puzzle pieces together. Thus God not only makes a promise, He progressively builds upon that promise, expanding and giving new information about it throughout the unfolding of Jewish history, until it is eventually fulfilled through Jesus.

Therefore, we trace God's progress of revelation through the writings of human authors: what God has told them, what they wrote, and what they understood. We do not collapse all of redemptive history into a single statement about Jesus the Messiah that does not appreciate the progressive nature of God's revelation. There is a relationship and connection to the concept of Messiah in sacred scriptures, while there is also development as Jewish history unfolds and God provides more and more pieces of His messianic puzzle. Thus, methods for determining the multiple human authors' histories about a Messiah (i.e., historical-exegetical) as well as methods for coming to grips with the divine Author's revelation about Messiah (i.e., theological-canonical) are embraced and employed throughout this work.

### **Part One: "Promises of Israel's King"**

In this portion of the book, Johnston addresses the contextual and canonical introductory dimensions that are foundational for the Davidic dynasty of Israel. The contextual dimension focuses on the original, historical, exegetical meaning of key passages. The canonical dimensions identify trajectories, which innerbiblical development in later Old Testament passages unpack. Contextual analysis indicates that Old Testament promises of royal dynasty and victory are clear—yet open enough to allow for later development of a diversity of eschatological messianic roles and expectations. Canonical analysis reveals how the ancient dynastic promises come to be interpreted. This canonical usage also provides the segue to the develop-

17 See footnote 4.

ment of various forms of eschatological messianism, evident in Second Temple literature and in the early church.

***Part Two: "Expectations of Israel's King"***

Bateman takes the second step in our threefold hermeneutic (contextual-canonical introductions, messianic reflections, christological conclusions). The move is made from historical, royal, dynastic promises of the First Testament to various portraits of eschatological messianic expectations evident in Second Temple literature. The discussion in this section is twofold. First, it identifies obstacles that hinder our ability to trace the history of ideas about eschatological messianism during this period: our limited resources, our blurred vision, and our lack of Second Temple historical and social sensitivities (chapter 8). Second, it isolates and illustrates from Second Temple literature epithets typically employed for speaking of expected messianic figures: "Messiah" (chapter 9), "Prince" and "Branch" (chapter 10), and "Son" (chapter 11). Bateman identifies how a variety of messianic expectations arose from a combination of two factors: (1) the openness of First Testament promises and hopes concerning the restoration of David's dynasty; and (2) the socio-historical dissatisfactions with current Judean leadership (e.g., the Hasmonean dynasty).

***Part Three: "Coming of Israel's King"***

Bock explains how the New Testament builds upon and unifies the First Testament promise of Messiah, adopts First Testament concepts about the Messiah, and presents the Old Testament idea of Messiah, due in part to first-century reflections of the Messiah figure revealed in Jesus and in part to God's authentication of Him. In this section, Bock works backwards from the Epistles toward the Gospels. This route is taken because (1) most of the texts he chooses, especially the ones he works with first, are not debated as to their messianic affirmation, in contrast to the texts in the promise section covering the First Testament and some of the texts to be treated in the Gospels; (2) the Gospels are complicated, working with two time frames (that of the Jesus event and the time frame of the evangelist); and (3) by working backwards we can retrace the development of the argument starting from the least debated texts. In this way, we can work back to the origins of the messianic concept in the activity of Jesus, something debated among New Testament scholars, but something that can be contended for, in part, as a result of carefully studying what emerged in the later confession of the church. Thus, Bock intentionally alters his approach, and thereby does not take a chronological tack in treating this material.

Here, he discusses the "already-not yet" developments in the fulfillments of what Messiah Jesus does, as Jesus presents a Messiah in two comings (suffering and then glory). He also shows how this portrait is presented gradually in the Synoptic Gospels, emphasizing four mysteries that both make the presentation possible and unify the portrait. In two chapters, "Jesus the Messiah in the Gospels" and "Jesus the Messiah in Acts and the Early Church," Bock first identifies how the kingdom that Jesus the Mes-



siah brings grows. It is *not large all at once* but grows from small to large. Second, he shows that the major opponent is Satan, not political structures as such. Third, Gentiles will be present in a way equal to Jews and yet in a way that connects the covenant promise. Finally, and most crucially for Jesus' ultimate messianic identity, is how He ties together the kingdom, His role, and His identity with the figure of the Son of Man. This results in a unique combination of divine-human authority for the delivering figure that had been seen previously in Judaism. So we see how Jesus represented the concept of Messiah, or the core figure of the new era, in ways that nuanced the older presentation by bringing certain distinct images more closely together.

Thus, the New Testament presents a coherent portrait of Messiah, which addresses Jewish backgrounds and yet goes its own way due to the teachings of Jesus and the revelatory work of God and the Holy Spirit through Jesus. It is this combination of features that produces our hermeneutical proposal, which helps to draw on the key historical elements of Jewish background and the period of Jesus and the early church. The concluding chapter provides a synthesis of the study, revealing the coherence of the canonical portrait in its historical context as a hermeneutical way to understand how God authenticated Jesus.

## Our Audience

*Jesus the Messiah: Tracing the Promises, Expectations, and Coming of Israel's King* is not intended to be an overly technical work. And though it addresses issues of interpretation, it is written for anyone seriously versed in Scripture. More specifically, it is written for all those who wrestle with how the messianic portrait and claims of Scripture for Jesus work within human history and divine revelation. It is intended to help those who fail to see any connection between promise in the Old Testament and fulfillment in the New Testament about Messiah, as well as to nudge others to consider moving beyond the notion that all Old Testament readings about "Messiah" were fixed and only spoke directly about Jesus. Thus, we neither minimize nor maximize the connection with the Old Testament and/or first-century Jewish cultural understanding of Messiah, but rather offer an approach somewhere between the two.

Our book is not solely a historical sketching of facts, it is not solely a theological treatise, nor is it solely a literary appraisal of the Bible. It is, however, a work that wrestles with all three: history, theology, and literature. How has our God revealed His kingdom program to us in progressive stages? What exactly does God reveal and when does He reveal it over long periods of time via His unfolding of world historical events that directly affect the Jewish people, through whom God works out His kingdom program? How much of God's kingdom program did those inspired human authors know completely when they composed their unique contributions to Holy Scripture? Ultimately, how is the first-century Jew any different from us today? Whereas they had one Testament to reflect upon, we have two. And

though we are twenty-first-century followers of Jesus, the One through whom God's kingdom program has been inaugurated, who have far more revelation than people of the first century, do we have all the pieces of the messianic puzzle necessary to determine the consummation of God's kingdom program yet to come through the second coming of His anointed one, Jesus? Today, we may have a more complete canonical portrait, but we still do not have all the pieces of God's messianic puzzle. That is because ultimately God wants us to trust Him for the time when He will complete His kingdom program.

Therefore, it is our hope that you will better comprehend, and even more importantly, appreciate, the dynamics of messianic prophecy and fulfillment. These dynamics show that God not only made promises, He also progressively built upon those initial promises and eventually fulfilled them through Jesus, the One through whom God inaugurated His kingdom program. And yet, the consummation of that kingdom is still to come. Scripture, early Christian preaching, and history point to Jesus as God's Messiah, Israel's king, who rules over, and is worshiped by, Jew and Gentile alike.

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# A Conversation with Michael Rydelnik



Dr. Michael Rydelnik, professor of Jewish studies at Moody Bible Institute, recently wrote *The Messianic Hope: Is the Hebrew Bible Really Messianic?* (Nashville: B & H Publishers, 2010). In that book, he makes the case that the Hebrew Bible was intended to be a messianic text and, therefore, should be read as such. Rather than have him restate the arguments he laid out in that book, we interviewed him about his thoughts on the exegesis of messianic prophecy.

**Mishkan: Do you advocate the use of a list of messianic prophecies with their New Testament fulfillments?**

Proof texting has been the standard approach to presenting messianic prophecy from the age of the apologists until today. Nevertheless, the problem with using this approach is that often it disregards or misunderstands the context.

I think Jesus' emphasis was not just on the individual verses but rather on the overall understanding of the biblical books. In Luke 24:25–27, Jesus said, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in *all* that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary for the Messiah to suffer these things and to enter into His glory? And beginning with Moses and with *all* the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in *all* the Scriptures." Note his emphasis on *all* the Scriptures. He was not saying that the Hebrew Bible was messianic in fifty or sixty isolated passages but rather that it was messianic in its intent. It went even deeper—according to Him, the Hebrew Bible was messianic down to its DNA, in the fiber and fabric of the text. Jesus saw the Messiah, not merely in occasional, isolated texts, but in all the Scriptures. This is what He taught His disciples, and therefore Peter made the same case. The apostle quoted Moses' words in Deuteronomy 18:15–19, and then argued that "all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those after him, have also announced these days" (Acts 3:24). Not surprisingly, this is similar to the Talmudic dictum, "Every prophet prophesied only of the days of the Messiah" (b. Ber. 34b).

My point is that the individual verses make far more sense as messianic predictions when read with this perspective. Furthermore, when reading them within the broader, canonical context, they were understood as messianic. Evidently, later biblical authors, writing in the Hebrew Bible, read earlier passages in the Pentateuch, for example, and understood these passages as having a messianic meaning. And Jesus, when He read the Hebrew Bible, saw the Messiah there and understood that He was the true referent of those passages. I agree with A. T. Robertson, who wrote, "Jesus found himself in the Old Testament, a thing that modern scholars do not seem to be able to do."

***Mishkan*: It is sometimes claimed that the Hebrew Scriptures could not possibly include clear and direct messianic prophecy, else the Jewish people would have had a better understanding of the coming Messiah during the intertestamental period, and especially during the days of Yeshua's earthly ministry. Does the fact that the majority of the Jewish people did not really "get it" indicate that we are trying to "read the New Testament into the Old Testament"?**

It is my opinion that the Hebrew Scriptures were never intended to be read as the national spiritual library of Israel. Rather, the Hebrew prophets wrote the books of the Hebrew Bible to the faithful remnant of Israel who would have understood its messianic message. For those who did not read the Scriptures with the eyes of faith, the prophets' message was unclear. That is the effect of spiritual blindness. It's why Jesus said to the men on the road to Emmaus that they were "foolish men and slow of heart to believe." According to the Messiah Himself, the reason they did not "get it" is not because it wasn't there, but because they were foolish and faithless. I could just imagine what Jesus would have said if He believed that the prophets didn't foretell the Messiah. He would have taken those guys on the road to Emmaus and said, "O poor men of faith, you could not understand what the prophets had spoken of me, because they had not yet been given their full sense of meaning, their *sensus plenior*, until this very moment, as I am explaining them to you!"

On the other hand, the faithful remnant in New Testament times did understand the messianic hope of the Hebrew Bible. Simeon and Anna are examples of this godly remnant that read the Scriptures and were, therefore, looking for "the consolation of Israel."

Spiritual blindness did not keep Jewish interpreters from seeing Messiah in the Hebrew Bible—it only kept them from seeing Jesus as the fulfillment of their expectations. Intertestamental and talmudic Judaism had a strong messianic hope. We have to wonder, why was there so much messianic expectation in the Targums, the Midrash, and even in the Talmud? Although some have tried to dismiss this question by pointing to an alleged expectation that the Davidic house would be restored in the post-exilic period, and when that failed, intertestamental Jews spontaneously came up with a

messianic idea. This begs credulity, particularly because the Jewish writings don't link their messianic expectations with disappointment in the Davidic house but to the prophetic expectation of the Messiah in the Scriptures.

***Mishkan*: Why is it, then, that well-intentioned exegetes fail to see much, or even any, direct messianic prediction in the Hebrew Bible?**

No doubt they have the best intentions, but I do believe they are mistaken in adopting multiple meanings in the text of Scripture. By that I mean, they see the authors of the Hebrew Bible as referring to a historical referent in their own day, and only by type, midrashic interpretation, or double meanings (*sensus plenior*) do they find a messianic element. Several factors lead them down a path of minimizing direct messianic prediction.

First, I think this approach to messianic interpretation focuses on the historical event behind the text, rather than the text itself. This is significant, because the Bible claims inspiration, not for the historical events behind the text, but for the text itself. It is all *Scripture* that is inspired. That's not to say that the historical events did not happen, but rather that the authors of Scripture, moved by the Holy Spirit, gave an inspired understanding of those events. Interpreting the text rather than the events will radically change our understanding of the Scriptures. I'm often amused when these event-oriented interpreters tell me that Genesis 3:15 can't be messianic, because Eve would not have understood the message. The goal of the interpreter is not to find out what the characters in the story could or couldn't understand—rather it is to discern the author's meaning. I don't need to know what Eve understood, but what Moses intended his writing to mean. That is discovered by reading the Pentateuch holistically to see how the author developed the theme of "the seed." Others argue that Numbers 24 can't be messianic, because Balaam would not have intended that meaning. This overlooks the fact that Balaam did not write Numbers—Moses did. My favorite is a friend who told me that Isaiah 7:13–15 couldn't be messianic, because the original audience could not understand it by reading it as carefully as I had. When I asked him who the original audience was, he said Ahaz. Then he was shocked when I told him that he was mistaken. The event described in Isaiah 7 includes Ahaz as a character. But the book of Isaiah was written by the prophet to the faithful remnant of Israel who could have read the passage as carefully as I had. They could have also read the whole book and seen the compositional strategies the author had used to sustain a messianic interpretation. The original audience could understand the messianic hope by reading the text of Scripture, not by trying to recreate the events behind that text.

A second factor that causes some to fail to see the messianic aspect of the Hebrew Bible is the frequent tendency to treat the Masoretic Text [MT] as a *textus receptus*. Not surprisingly, the MT reflects the consolidation of the Hebrew text as passed down from rabbinic Judaism. And just as unsurprisingly, the MT also will occasionally adopt the historical interpretations of



rabbinic Judaism. And while there is a good bit of messianic expectation in that text, why should we be surprised when the variant readings seem to argue for an even more eschatological/messianic reading?

A third element in the minimizing of direct messianic interpretation is the failure to grasp an accurate understanding of the doctrine of inspiration. By this I mean that some will argue, correctly, that the Bible is a theanthropic book—that is, written by God the Holy Spirit and a human author at the same time. However, from this they derive, I think mistakenly, that the human author may not have had any messianic intent whatsoever, while the Holy Spirit could have a secondary intent that was indeed messianic. As a result, the New Testament is said to uncover the Holy Spirit's meaning that the human author did not originally understand. Sometimes advocates of this view maintain that an interpreter, like me, overemphasizes the Holy Spirit's meaning and ignores the human author's intention. It seems to me that this approach to the divine inspiration of Scripture makes the text somewhat schizophrenic. It is better to understand that the human and divine authors are absolutely in agreement with each other as to what a text means. In fact, divine inspiration would not, and could not, change what the human author intended. Rather, inspiration guarantees that the human author's intention is one hundred percent true and accurate. As a result, we should not be surprised if a divinely superintended author could look hundreds of years into the future and foretell the events surrounding the promised Messiah. Recently, I was amused when reading an article by an advocate of *sensus plenior*. He had written about a chapter in the prophets that has been historically understood as a messianic passage. After denying that this was the human author's meaning, he suggested that the Holy Spirit left some hints of a hidden, messianic *sensus plenior* right in that text. I laughed and wondered, Why not take these hints as the human author's attempt to reveal, under the superintending of the Holy Spirit, the actual, messianic meaning of this passage?

A fourth factor that causes some to miss the messianic intention of the original authors is the habit of careful exegetes to read atomistically rather than holistically. If we read each part of the Bible as if it were a free standing paragraph, divorced from the rest of the book, it's no wonder that we then focus on the historical understanding of it. But if we read the text as part of a whole book, rather than an isolated passage, we can see how the author develops themes, gives innerbiblical explanations of his words, and articulates compositional strategies that reveal messianic meaning. T. D. Alexander once wrote, and I'm paraphrasing here, that if he were to read Genesis 3:15 atomistically he could never understand its messianic significance. But if he reads it in light of Genesis, the entire Pentateuch, and the rest of the Bible, he can not miss the messianic significance. I think he nails the point I'm trying to make.

Finally, a factor that leads some to fail to see the messianic intention of biblical books is that they read as if the Bible were a series of journal entries, where the author and the reader don't know what the outcome of their writings will be. But we don't have Moses' or Isaiah's journal. We



have their books. Moreover, we have their books in their final canonical shape. Whoever shaped that canon wanted to make sure that the point of the books was understood. That's why William Horbury has argued that the messianic hope of the pre-exilic prophets was clarified in the editing and collecting of the Old Testament books. According to him, this explains the presence of the messianic idea in the intertestamental period, the New Testament, and the rabbinic writings. If we read the text of the Hebrew Bible in its final form, rather than speculating on how these books developed, we have no choice but to see the messianic meaning of the Hebrew Bible.

***Mishkan:* So do you think that every New Testament quotation of a passage from the Hebrew Bible is evidence that it is messianic?**

Actually, that is not what I think. I wrote a whole chapter about this in my book. In my opinion, the New Testament consistently uses the Hebrew Bible four different ways: as direct fulfillment, typical fulfillment (where there is evidence that the OT author also understood the type), applicational fulfillment (where a true principle from the OT text is applied to a situation current in the NT), and summary fulfillment (where the NT summarizes a prophetic theme of the Hebrew Bible). These are all legitimate and correct uses of the Hebrew Bible. It seems strange to me to argue that Jesus and His disciples engaged in creative exegesis.

***Mishkan:* So is this issue really that important?**

Amazingly so! Jesus and the apostles claimed that Jesus was the Messiah because He fulfilled the messianic predictions of the Hebrew Bible. If this is only true in a secondary way, why bother believing in Jesus? I always wonder what my rabbi would say if, when I told him of my faith in Jesus as Messiah, I adopted some sort of double meaning approach. "Rabbi," I would say, "the prophetic author of these passages understood that they would be fulfilled by someone in his own day. But the New Testament reveals that there was a secret, second meaning, divorced from the original context, which is fulfilled by Jesus." He would dismiss this ambiguity without much thought and tell me, "I think I'll just accept what the original author intended and forego the secret, secondary meaning." And he would be right. It's imperative that we understand that Jesus is the Messiah because He is the one "of whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote" (John 1:45). That makes Him not only the Jewish Messiah but also the Redeemer for all.





## “A Prophet Like Me”

- Deuteronomy 18:15

by **Seth Postell**

When we hear the word “Torah,” we frequently think of the laws God gave to our people or else about the particular book that contains those laws. While these are legitimate meanings of “Torah,” they also represent a truncated view, for the Torah is more than that. It is also a book of prophecy. In fact, it is *the* book of prophecy that informed and guided all subsequent prophets and prophecies in the Tanakh. Thus, the Torah is not simply a list of rules to live by in the here and now; it is also a compendium of laws, narratives, and poems to *inform the reader how to prepare for the future.*

In what way is the Torah prophetic?

First, the structure of the Torah as a whole is “stitched” together around the theme of the future. At every major junction in the Torah, a central figure (Jacob, Balaam, and Moses) declares what God would do in “the last days” (Gen 49:1; Num 24:14; Deut 31:28–29) through the Messiah-King from the tribe of Judah (Gen 49:10–12; Num 24:7–9, 17–24; Deut 32:43; 33:5, 7).

Second, the Torah frequently uses similes or types to inform the careful and prayerful reader about future events. One example from the life of Abram (Abraham) will suffice. During a period of famine, Abram goes to Egypt, where his wife is taken captive in Pharaoh’s house. God delivers Sarai (Sarah) by striking Pharaoh’s house with plagues; Abram acquires great wealth; Pharaoh tells Abram to go; and so he returns to the Promised Land (Gen 12:10–13:2). The attentive reader will immediately notice that this is Israel’s story as well. Abram’s sojourn is a simile or prophetic type pointing to future events, in this case, the exodus.

In Deuteronomy 18:15, Moses states, “A prophet from among you, from your brothers, *like me*, the Lord your God will raise up for you, you must listen to him.” Notice the language of simile (comparison): a prophet “like” Moses. The new covenant writers identified Yeshua as the fulfillment of this verse (see Acts 3:22) because, among other things, they witnessed many parallels between Yeshua’s life and ministry and Moses’. Not only did events in Yeshua’s life correspond to those which happened to Moses (e.g., the killing of Hebrew boys by evil tyrants at their birth [Matt 2:16;

Exod 1:6–22]; fasting for forty days and forty nights in the desert [Matt 4:2; Exod 34:28]), but also the signs and wonders performed by Yeshua were remarkably similar to those performed by Moses (e.g., turning water into a red substance, wine and blood respectively [John 2:1–12; Exod 7:14–25]; a miraculous crossing of a body of water [Matt 14:22–36; Exod 14:13–31]). Yeshua was, no doubt, a prophet like Moses both in word and in deed.

However, there is a problem we must discuss. There are many who argue that Deuteronomy 18:15 was never *intended* to be a messianic prophecy at all. These people frequently fault the new covenant writers (and modern Messianic Jewish believers) with taking Deuteronomy 18:15 out of context. Deuteronomy 18:15, they claim, is not speaking about *one* specific individual, but *all* subsequent prophets throughout Israel's history (the office of a prophet). A careful reading of the verse in its context, they say, suggests that Moses is speaking about various prophets the Lord would raise up for Israel when they enter the land so that they would not follow the detestable practices of the original inhabitants (Deut 18:9–14).

At this point my detractors might say, "There we have it, case closed!" Not so fast. There is an old adage that goes, "The best commentary on Scripture is Scripture." The earliest interpretation of Moses' words in Deuteronomy 18:15 on record is found at the end of the Torah itself, Deuteronomy 34:10: "And a prophet like Moses has never again arisen in Israel whom the Lord knew face to face" (see Num 12:8). Many Bible scholars realize that Moses could not have written Deuteronomy 34. Why? According to Deuteronomy 34:6, Moses has been dead for a very long time. Moreover, the Hebrew syntax of verse 10 implies that the writer (an individual who is no less inspired than Moses) has evaluated all the prophets throughout Israel's biblical history (Joshua–Malachi), and has concluded that a prophet like Moses never came, neither in a succession of prophets nor in any single individual prophet. In other words, although Moses promised that the Lord would raise up a prophet like him (Deut 18:15)—and the Lord had indeed raised up many prophets throughout Israel's history—the literal words of Moses never materialized. Thus, this unknown author at the end of Israel's biblical history not only understood the words of Deuteronomy 18:15 as a reference to an individual prophet, but also concluded that this prophet never appeared. The ending of the Torah, therefore, introduces a bit of tension between Moses' literal words in Deuteronomy 18:15 and the evaluation of these words in Deuteronomy 34:10. Moses promised, but it never happened. How can this be?! This tension between Israel's past and Israel's present (namely, the time Deuteronomy 34 was written) could, therefore, only be resolved sometime in Israel's future. Incidentally, the Prophets conclude in a manner virtually identical to the Torah, namely, with an eschatological hope in the coming of a prophet like Moses (see Mal



**This tension between Israel's past and Israel's present (namely, the time Deuteronomy 34 was written) could, therefore, only be resolved sometime in Israel's future. . . . The Torah ends, therefore, with an expectant eye toward the future.**

4:5 [Hebrew 3:23]). The Torah ends, therefore, with an expectant eye toward the future.

The early history of the interpretation of Deuteronomy 18:15 (before the time of Yeshua), moreover, strongly supports these conclusions—namely, that the Torah concludes with a door wide open to the coming of a future messianic prophet. The new covenant writers studied the Torah carefully, seeking for clues about this promised prophet in the details of Moses' life. And when this long-awaited prophet arrived, they recognized Him immediately!

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# Origins of the Modern Hebrew Christian Movement in Britain\*



by **Michael Darby**

Born into a Polish Chasidic family and a student of Hebrew and Jewish law and ceremony, a Messianic Jew devoutly documents his belief that the Christian church was in error when it rejected both the law and the people of God. He declares the superiority of biblical Judaism over Gentile Christianity, and calls on Protestants to eliminate false doctrine from their religion by converting to biblical Judaism. He holds the view that believing Jews understand the Messiah better than Gentile Christians, and that Jewish Christians should formulate a new body of doctrine for the whole church. His opinion is that when Jewish people become believers in Christ they do not become Gentile Christians but remain in Judaism as Messianic Jews and assume the role of leaders of the whole believing community. His vision is not only of full independence but also of full responsibility for Jewish believers in Jesus ethnically, institutionally, theologically, and liturgically.

This is no latter-day Messianic Jew, however, documenting his beliefs in one of the recent journals of religion; this is a Messianic Jew summarizing his radical ideology in 1840s England. Stanislaus Hoga, one of the ablest Hebrew scholars in Europe, was the first Jewish advocate of Messianic Judaism in modern Britain. Yet, for the next fifty years, the history of Jewish Christianity in this country reveals the reluctance of the movement's leaders to follow his example.

In *Messianic Jewish Manifesto*,<sup>1</sup> David Stern emphasizes the importance of history for Messianic Jews because history determines identity and calling. He encourages them to be personally involved in their own history, just as the Passover *Haggadah* encourages them to experience the exodus

\* This is a summary of my monograph, *The Emergence of the Hebrew Christian Movement in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), which is an introduction and overview where sources have been acknowledged. The author would like to thank Koninklijke Brill NV for permission to reproduce material from this publication and Richard Harvey who suggested the inclusion of this article.

1 David Stern, *Messianic Jewish Manifesto* (Jerusalem: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1988).

as part of their heritage. Stern also suggests that Jewish believers should be personally involved in the history of relations between Israel and the church. He sees the Messianic Jewish community as the vehicle for healing history's greatest schism—part of *tikkun olam*.

In his letter to the Romans (11:11–24), Paul compares the spiritual heritage of Israel to the olive tree and suggests that it is into this tree that both Jewish and Gentile Christians have been brought. The tree, however, belongs to the Jews, and the emphasis is on what God intends to do for and through them for world blessing. However, the historical unity of the Jewish elements of the olive tree is not yet apparent in the literature. The olive tree cannot yet be seen; the thread of Jewish Christian witness across the centuries is not yet visible. This article, then, is an attempt to encourage others to research this story and to fill out the picture of the spiritual heritage of Hebrew Christians and Messianic Jews. It is a summary of my monograph.

### **Joseph Priestley and Thomas Witherby**

At the end of the eighteenth century, the most prominent advocate of the observance of the Torah by Jewish Christians was the millenarian Joseph Priestley (1733–1804)—scientist, educator, controversialist, and minister of the New Meeting, Birmingham. He sets the pattern for the debate about Jewish Christianity, which lasted throughout the nineteenth century and beyond. By proposing a separate church where culturally Jewish believers would acknowledge the validity of the law of Moses and observe the rites of Judaism, he identified the four elements of independence that Jewish Christians would claim for themselves across the decades and Gentile supporters would recommend: ethnic, institutional, theological, and liturgical. Although he adopted an intellectual approach and was never involved in the realization of his vision, he was the ideological pioneer not only of Hebrew Christianity but also of Messianic Judaism, and provided the framework within which nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Jewish Christian initiatives are categorized in this study.

Priestley was not alone in his interest in Jewish restoration. Thomas Witherby, a lay member of the Church of England, was a solicitor in the city of London. Writing in the generation following Priestley, Witherby arrived at similar conclusions about the position of Jewish Christianity in the economy of God. He lamented the lack of a Jewish Christian church, supported the view that Jewish believers should retain their national distinctions without renouncing the law of Moses, and advocated the integration of the rites of Judaism within worship. He, thus, associated himself with the four aspects of Jewish Christian independence identified by Priestley: ethnic, institutional, theological, and liturgical. Like his predecessor, his approach was ideological, and he was never involved in the establishment of the church of his imagination. In one important respect, however, Witherby went a step further than Priestley. His perspective moved beyond the equality of the Old and New Testaments to the inseparable unity of the Jewish and

Christian religions, where the Jewish religion is the true foundation without which the Christian church would become weak and unstable. His mature view was that Christianity is Jewish and that Gentile Christians should not disparage its Jewish elements. It would be left to a Hebrew Christian from Germany to begin to put some of these principles into practice among Jewish believers in Britain.

### **Joseph Samuel Christian Frederick Frey and One of the Second Tribe**

Joseph Samuel Christian Frederick Frey, father of the Hebrew Christian movement in Britain, was born near Wurzburg, Germany, of Orthodox Jewish parents in 1771. His father, Samuel Levi, was a *moreh tzedek* who helped members of the Jewish community with problems related to the observance and celebration of traditional rituals. Frey's view of the retention of Jewish cultural traditions in Christian worship was that the ceremonial law was abrogated; the observances of Judaism were irreverent and burdensome in comparison with the ease of the Christian faith and were no longer relevant.

Despite these reservations, Frey was motivated to assemble Jewish converts in ethnic association for mutual encouragement and edification, and can justifiably be characterized as the father of modern Hebrew Christianity in Britain. Almost all the Hebrew Christian institutions of the nineteenth century were the indirect fruit of his ministry, and he set a precedent in his chairmanship of the Children of Abraham and his influence on the establishment of the United Brothers of the Seed of Abraham. Frey was a man of perseverance and tenacity in the face of many discouragements and difficulties. As a pioneer he was often misunderstood, and he was involved in many disagreements with the committees of the London Missionary Society and the London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews (LSPCJ). Frey experienced Jewish traditional observances early in life through his father's work as a *moreh tzedek*, but he later rejected them along with Judaism and left to others the discussion of Hebrew Christian liturgical independence, later in the nineteenth century.

His organizational initiatives began in 1805, when he established the first Hebrew Christian prayer meeting in modern Britain and continued with Artillery Street Chapel, Bishopsgate, in 1808, the first place of worship set aside in Britain for the use of Jewish people, and Jews' Chapel, Spitalfields, in 1809, the first Hebrew Christian congregation to be established by a Jewish missionary society. These organizations also welcomed Gentile worshippers. The first association exclusively for Hebrew Christians was founded by Frey in 1813 under the auspices of the LSPCJ, and its establishment led to the subsequent foundation of the first independent Hebrew Christian society, the United Brothers of the Seed of Abraham. This society was founded in opposition to Anglican interests and set a pattern, seen throughout the nineteenth century, of strained relations between Jewish converts and the established church.



Frey was far from convinced of the continuing importance of Judaism in an understanding of Christianity and readily accepted the dominance of the New Testament over the Old. Yet one “child of Abraham” reproached the LSPCJ for insufficient study of the law of Moses. Known only by the pseudonym “One of the Second Tribe,” he was the first modern Christian Israelite to advocate the equality of the Testaments and the first to challenge the hegemony of the Gentile Anglican church in the new evangelistic approach to the Jewish people by emphasizing the Jewishness of Christianity. He made his views known in a series of letters in 1817 and 1818 to *The Jewish Expositor*, the periodical of the LSPCJ. The main point of his argument lay in his hope that this periodical might indeed become a Jewish expositor in a sense which the editors had not yet contemplated. It was clear to him that a believer in Jesus could be both Jewish and Christian, and he participated in the debate about Hebrew Christian identity, which lasted throughout the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. He was one of the pioneers not only of Hebrew Christian but also of Messianic Jewish theological independence by daring to suggest that Judaism still had something more to teach Christianity.

### **Philo-Judaeae Society and LSPCJ**

During the 1820s, a difference of opinion developed among subscribers to the LSPCJ over the issue of the emancipation of the Jewish people, which led eventually to the formation of a dissenting association, the Philo-Judaeae Society. The committee of this organization was of the opinion that the establishment of a Hebrew Christian church, whose faith would be founded on the truth as it was in Jesus and its discipline and form of worship on the ancient Jewish liturgy, would be the most consistent method of providing for the spiritual edification of Jewish Christians. By the 1840s, the society was displaying a measure of theological independence by emphasizing the importance of the Law and the Prophets. Here, for the first time in modern Britain, a Jewish missionary society was promulgating a vision not only of a Hebrew Christian church but also, in embryonic form, of a Messianic Jewish congregation. The four elements of Jewish Christian independence identified above are revealed in the vision: ethnic, institutional, theological, and liturgical.

The committee of the LSPCJ was of the opinion that important advantages would result from all the converted Jews being assembled in one place of worship. Such a considerable number in one congregation under the patronage of the established church could not fail to attract and ultimately command the attention of the Jewish nation, and, as a consequence, the LSPCJ’s two congregations of Jewish converts—Jews’ Chapel, Spitalfields, and the Episcopal Jews’ Chapel, Palestine Place—were united at the site of Palestine Place. Great efforts were made to communicate in the Hebrew language: the Hebrew inscription over the entrance to the Episcopal Jews’ Chapel, the Hebrew services in the chapel, the law in Hebrew characters on the transparency fixed to the chapel window, translations of the New



Testament and liturgy, and renditions of Hebrew hymns by pupils in the Jewish boys' and girls' schools. These efforts to construct a Hebrew Christian church constituted an attempt to capture the imagination of the Jewish people but failed to allow them the opportunity to take theological or liturgical initiatives.

### **John Oxlee and Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna**

In the atmosphere of heightened public interest in the affairs of the Jewish people during the late 1830s and early 1840s, a Gentile Anglican clergyman from Yorkshire, John Oxlee, instigated an intense public debate over the freedom of Hebrew Christians to retain Jewish religious practices in their celebration of the Christian faith. As a student of the Hebrew language and Jewish law, he believed that Hebrew Christians should not cease to be Jews nor abandon the law of Moses but should assemble in an exclusive Nazarene community. His original contribution to the debate, however, lay in his radical view that when Jewish people became believers in Christ they did not become Gentile Christians but remained in Judaism as Messianic Jews. Jewish believers were the natural branches of the olive tree and Gentile believers were the wild branches. Jewish believers, therefore, had advantages which Gentile believers did not have. His interpretation of Romans 11:1–24 placed Jewish believers at the center of God's plan of salvation and defined them as first among equals.

As a Gentile Anglican priest, Oxlee took advantage of his distance from the Jewish community to put forward proposals which no other Gentile believer in Britain would have the confidence to promulgate until the end of the nineteenth century. He was the ideological forerunner of the Russian pioneer of practical Messianic Judaism, Joseph Rabinowitz, and looked forward to one universal religion in which the gospel covenant appeared to be an enlargement, extension, or completion of the Mosaic covenant in order that Gentiles as well as Jews may become children of God. He believed that sound Christianity formed an integral part of sound Judaism and proposed the ethnic, institutional, theological, and liturgical independence not only of Hebrew Christianity but also of what would later become known as Messianic Judaism.

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Another Gentile interested in the salvation of the Jewish nation at this time was Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna, well known in evangelical circles as a writer and editor. She was convinced that the national restoration of the Jewish people was a scriptural truth, that Christianity was contained within biblical Judaism and that the Jewish root bore the Gentile believers



in God's plan of salvation in the New Testament analogy of the olive tree. She believed that Hebrew Christians should retain their national religious practices in their celebration of the Christian faith and that they should not cease to be Jews or abandon the law of Moses. Passover, the Sabbath, and wearing the *tallit gadol* were ordinances of Judaism particularly suited to maintain the distinctiveness of the Jewish people. Tonna drew out to a large extent the practical implications of her views. Her vision was one of Messianic Judaism, and she foresaw the Jews, as Jews, taking a leading role in the spread of Christianity. She was encouraged by the establishment of a Hebrew Christian congregation by the LSPCJ on Mount Zion under a Jewish bishop, even though the assembly was firmly established in the Protestant tradition and the liturgy was that of the Church of England. Her belief was in the ethnic, institutional, theological, and liturgical independence of Jewish believers in Christ.

### **Ridley Haim Herschell and Moses Margoliouth**

The first Jewish believer in Jesus to found an independent chapel and a periodical for Hebrew Christians in Britain dedicated his life to the practical edification of believers, both Jewish and Gentile. Anglican baptism, Presbyterian ordination, and a refusal to join a particular denomination testified to Ridley Haim Herschell's catholic sympathies and independence of mind, and the establishment of Trinity Chapel was symbolic of these qualities. Here he ministered to all sections of society and the church, and invited discussion of theological issues through the medium of his journal, *The Voice of Israel*. He believed that on becoming a Christian a Jew was still bound to observe the law of Moses and thereby retain his national distinction. The law remained in force, and on embracing the faith of Christ, a Jew remained a Jew. Herschell did not call on Jews to withdraw from the churches of which they were members, and he responded with ambivalence to a proposal to establish a Judean church. He considered such a church perfectly lawful, theologically justified, and in no way schismatic, but the expediency of founding such an institution could fairly be questioned. The Christian church, he believed, was not robust enough to withstand anything out of the ordinary and lacked an understanding of the sin of baptizing unconverted men. A Judean church could achieve little more than holding occasional gatherings in some of the larger cities.

As a pastor and missionary, Herschell advocated the ethnic, institutional, and theological independence of Jewish Christians and put his theological beliefs into practice. He did not recommend liturgical independence since Gentile worshippers, Anglicans among them, were encouraged to attend Trinity Chapel. He had an inclusive view of Hebrew Christianity and was anxious to be conciliatory. Under his leadership, Trinity Chapel became a major center in West London for Jewish Christians for nearly twenty years. As the independent Hebrew Christian chapel in the capital, it was sharply distinguished from the Anglican Hebrew Christian church—Jews' Chapel, Palestine Place—in the East End.

Moses Margoliouth (formerly Epstein) was a Hebrew Christian who placed his Anglicanism before his Jewishness. He was appointed to several curacies and was an indefatigable worker among the Jewish people. His assessment of the importance of the Jewish nation led him to establish the ethnic independence of Hebrew Christians through the medium of his journal, *The Star of Jacob*, but his vision of Jewish distinctiveness was diluted by his recognition of the even greater significance of the Church of England. He identified Jewish converts as Christian Israelites rather than Hebrew or Jewish Christians and, although he believed that Christians were indebted to the Jews, he was firmly of the opinion that when Jews and Gentiles worshipped together the Jewish believers should refrain from observing the ceremonial law of Moses. Israel's ordinances had been abrogated and, moreover, the Anglican liturgy was a more scriptural and efficient means of evangelism. Maintaining that a Hebrew Christian church should never be established, Margoliouth later became one of the most prominent Anglican Hebrew Christians even though his support of the Church of England was qualified by his criticism of the LSPCJ.

### **Albert Augustus Isaacs, Nathan Davis, Charles Kingsley, and Moses Margoliouth**

The ethnic independence of Jewish believers was also advocated in the mid-nineteenth century by Albert Augustus Isaacs, a Hebrew Christian who became a missionary with the LSPCJ and later a priest in the Anglican Church. As the founder of the predominantly Gentile Cambridge University Prayer Union, he was the pioneer in Britain of a concept which would be instrumental in uniting many Hebrew Christians throughout the world during the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

Nathan Davis was a Hebrew Christian who accepted the support and training of the LSPCJ and became a missionary to the Jewish people. Although he advocated the ethnic and institutional independence of Jewish Christians by supporting the foundation of a union—the Hebrew Christian Union—no such society was established at this time. His achievement lay in his pioneering editorship of a journal for middle- and upper-class Jews, *The Hebrew Christian Magazine*, in which he attempted to reform missionary strategy by evangelizing from the Old Testament rather than the New and in which he sought to promote the unity of Hebrew Christians as an example to those members of the Jewish community who did not believe in Christ.

Jewish people who wished to retain their cultural independence after becoming members of the Christian church were supported in the early 1850s by Charles Kingsley, Anglican priest and novelist. Advocating the ethnic independence of Hebrew Christians, he called on converted Jews not to conceal their nationality, now that they had become members of the universal church, but to believe with the converts at Jerusalem that they were true Jews because they were Christians. They should believe that, as Jews, they had a special office in perfecting the faith and practice of the



church which no Englishman or other Gentile could perform for them. They should endeavor to see all heaven and earth with the eyes of Abraham, David, and St. Paul.

After the demise of Nathan Davis's *Hebrew Christian Magazine*, no attempt was made to re-establish a Hebrew Christian journal during the following twelve years. In September 1865, however, several Jewish Christian clergymen met at the London home of Moses Margoliouth as a provisional committee with a view to found a monthly periodical, *The Standard of Judah*, in January 1866, as the voice of the Christian Israelites' Association. After much meticulous planning, however, the attention of the committee was drawn to the publication of a rival prospectus which announced that another Hebrew Christian was about to issue a monthly Hebrew Christian magazine. Members of the committee were of the opinion that there was not room for two Christian Israelite periodicals and, in order to avoid antagonism, several of them decided to support the alternative publication. Margoliouth's acceptance of the importance of the Jewish nation led him to plan the ethnic and institutional independence of Hebrew Christians through the medium of *The Standard of Judah*, but his vision, along with that of his fellow clergymen, was not realized through his own initiative in the 1860s.

### **Carl August Ferdinand Schwartz**

A much greater impact was made on the Jewish Christian community by Carl August Ferdinand Schwartz, founder of the Hebrew Christian Alliance (HCA). He was born in Meseritz, in eastern Prussia (now Poland), in 1817, of Jewish parents. In summarizing his career, we cannot fail to recognize its unity and focus. He was endowed with an active and powerful mind, possessed energy and stamina, and remained warm-hearted and hopeful in the most discouraging circumstances. For nearly thirty years, he devoted himself to the Jewish mission—to bring the gospel before the Jewish people and to rouse the church to a deeper interest in Israel by a more thorough interpretation of Scripture. He completely identified himself with his work and succeeded in admitting over a hundred Israelites into the church. His wish to be an independent missionary unconnected with and unsupported by a Jewish committee found fruition in his ministry at Trinity Chapel, John Street, Marylebone, London, where he was supported by a congregation unaffiliated with any society or denomination. Schwartz was adamant that Hebrew Christians should not disregard their nationality and encouraged them to maintain their ethnic independence by acknowledging their cultural distinctiveness. In addition, he fulfilled his independence by founding a Home for Inquirers, the Hebrew Christian periodical *The Scattered Nation*, and the HCA. These institutions, together with his ordinations in the Anglican Church and the Free Church of Scotland, and a pastorate in the English Presbyterian Church, were testament to his breadth of views. He yearned to see Jew and Gentile working together in the church as one in Christ and did not ask converted Jews to withdraw from the churches they

were attending, although he viewed Hebrew Christians as the first among equals in the believing community.

The HCA, he believed, would prove to be a blessing not only to Israel but also to the Gentile church because, according to Scripture, it was engrafted into the natural olive tree which was Israel. On one level it was necessary to make Christians Jews, since biblical Judaism was the foundation on which Christianity was built and the church should break decisively with Greek Christianity and realize its identity within Hebrew Christianity. Liturgical independence, however, was out of the question because Hebrew Christians had seen enough of rites and ceremonies in the synagogue and did not wish to see them in the church. With branches in Adrianople (Edirne), Constantinople, Pesth, and Algeria, allied associations in Germany, Jerusalem, and America, and correspondents throughout the world, the HCA soon became an international organization over half a century before the establishment of the International Hebrew Christian Alliance in London in 1925.

Yet the HCA was still being ignored by the Anglican Church. Hebrew Christian missionaries working under the auspices of the LSPCJ were prohibited from corresponding with the alliance because of its perceived Judaizing tendencies, and senior officials of the Church of England declined to attend its annual meetings. When a member of the Anglican Church assumed the editorship of *The Scattered Nation* in 1871, he announced that the periodical would publish nothing which contradicted the doctrine of the Anglican liturgy, the Thirty-Nine Articles, or any other standard of evangelical truth, and that Christianity was dependent on the incorporation of the Jewish nation within the church. Schwartz's belief that the Gentile church was engrafted into the Jewish church was anathema. Although it was claimed that a majority of Jewish Christians were opposed to the "Judaizing tendency" of the HCA, Schwartz can be characterized as a staunch advocate of the ethnic, institutional, and theological independence of Hebrew Christians in the second half of the nineteenth century and the pioneer of the international dimension of Hebrew Christianity.

### Moses Margoliouth and Alfred Edersheim

Although Moses Margoliouth failed in his attempts to found a number of Jewish Christian institutions—a Hebrew Christian college, the Hebrew Christian Council for Revising the Authorized English Version of the Old Testament, and the Hebrew Christian Witness Chambers and Reading Room, he successfully established the ethnic and institutional independence of Hebrew Christians as the pioneer of large-scale Hebrew Christian conferences and as editor of *The Hebrew Christian Witness and Prophetic Investigator*. For the first time in his career, he also broached the issue of the theological independence of Jewish believers, defining Christianity as biblical Judaism. In the early church, he believed, Gentiles characterized Hebrew Christians as Jewish converts, forgetting that the Gentiles were the converts and not the Jews. The latter were "the natural branches . . . grafted into their own olive tree." Jewish believers in Christ were first denominated Christians, not



Gentile converts to the believing community. The Gentiles eventually monopolized the name as well as the promises made to the Israel of God, the Jewish followers of Christ. Margoliouth's vision of Jewish distinctiveness was circumscribed by his esteem for the leadership, liturgy, and evangelism of the Church of England, which was qualified only a little by his criticism of the LSPCJ; but he can, nevertheless, be characterized as an advocate of the ethnic and institutional independence of Hebrew Christians in the 1870s.

In 1877, for the first time, two Hebrew Christian periodicals were published simultaneously. Although Alfred Edersheim had declined to take over the editorship of Margoliouth's *Hebrew Christian Witness and Prophetic Investigator* in 1875, he began to edit his own journal, *Israel's Watchman, A Hebrew Christian Magazine*, two years later. Dr. Edersheim, a Hebrew and Bible scholar born in Vienna of Orthodox Jewish parents in March 1825, revealed in his first editorial his advocacy of the ethnic independence of Hebrew Christians. Over the next few years, however, the focus of the periodical changed from Hebrew Christianity to prophecy, and in its final manifestation as *The Prophetic News and Israel's Watchman*, the magazine increased still further the emphasis on prophecy and theology within its pages. The transformation of the periodical was complete by June 1880, when Edersheim relinquished the editorship and invited Rev. M. Baxter, an Anglican clergyman and editor of *The Christian Herald*, to succeed him. As a historian and interpreter of prophecy, Edersheim was more concerned with the past and future of the Jewish Christian community than with its contemporary circumstances in Britain, and his advocacy of the ethnic and institutional independence of Hebrew Christians was qualified by the catholic perspective which enabled him to serve both the Free Church of Scotland and the Church of England.

### **John Bingley Barraclough and Michael Rosenthal**

The first Hebrew Christian institution established in Britain during the 1880s was the Hebrew Christian Prayer Union (HCPU), founded under the auspices of the LSPCJ in 1882 by the Gentile Christian John Bingley Barraclough, who was born in Felkirk, Yorkshire, in 1843. Twelve years after the demise of Carl Schwartz's HCA of 1866–70, the HCPU, HCA, and Hebrew Christian Alliance and Prayer Union (HCA and PU) were established as agencies of Hebrew Christian ethnic and institutional independence until well beyond the end of the nineteenth century. Theological and liturgical independence, however, were out of the question for subscribers to the HCPU even though it restricted membership to Hebrew Christians and supported their national restoration. The union was established under the auspices of the LSPCJ, which was opposed to Jewish Christianity as an independent body, and its president, Henry Aaron Stern, was convinced that Anglican Christianity was more rational than the burdensome ritual of the synagogue. The ethnic independence of members of the HCA and PU, which included the maintenance of ancient national memories, was qualified by their desire to continue in communion with their local churches, but their self-definition

as Messianic Zionists pointed to their hopes of a future glorious destiny for their nation. The importance for the majority of British Hebrew Christians of the history and future of the Jewish people obscured the potential for contemporary theological reflection and liturgical organization, yet the international institutional dimension of Hebrew Christianity was maintained by members of the HCPU in at least ten countries.

Two Hebrew Christian institutions were founded during the last quarter of the nineteenth century by Michael Rosenthal (born in Russia in 1844), head of the East London Mission to the Jews. One of these institutions was without precedent in Britain in the nineteenth century. Despite the reservations of the Anglican bishops, his Hebrew Christian congregation in the Mission Hall in Commercial Road, London, had a communicants' roll of three hundred and, in the late 1890s, was the only congregation of its kind in Britain. As a High Churchman, Rosenthal employed the Anglican liturgy in his services but incorporated the Hebrew language and, for the first time, Hebrew music, in order to provide a welcoming environment for the members of his assembly. Rosenthal was also the founder of the largest Hebrew Christian association of the nineteenth century. The Hebrew Guild of Intercession claimed a roll of approximately 1,750 full members of Jewish nationality and was so successful that the rival HCPU was brought to the brink of extinction. The guild also sustained the international dimension of Hebrew Christianity with a particularly strong representation in the member countries of the British Commonwealth and, in spite of his commitment to the tenets of the Church of England, Rosenthal can be characterized as an advocate of the ethnic and institutional independence of Hebrew Christians in late nineteenth-century Britain.

### **Albert Augustus Isaacs and Adolf Saphir**

As the founder of the Cambridge University Prayer Union in the mid-nineteenth century, Albert Augustus Isaacs was the pioneer of the concept of the prayer union, which was realized in the early 1880s as the HCPU, and his advocacy of the ethnic and institutional independence of Jewish believers in Jesus was further promoted through his editorship of the Hebrew Christian periodical *The Everlasting Nation*. Although he was a missionary with the Anglican LSPCJ and a Church of England priest, he advocated the theological independence of Hebrew Christians by affirming the primacy of Israel in salvation history and the nation's central contemporary role in the evangelization of the world.

Born in Budapest in 1831, Aaron Adolf Saphir was a pivotal figure in the British Hebrew Christian movement during the second half of the nineteenth century, providing a direct link between three leading Jewish Christians. As minister to three English Presbyterian congregations in London from 1861, he linked the evangelism of Ridley Haim Herschell in the 1840s and 1850s to the missionary efforts of Charles Schönberger, co-founder in the 1890s of the Hebrew Christian Testimony to Israel, the second major Jewish missionary society to be founded and led by Hebrew Christians.



He introduced his brother-in-law, Carl Schwartz, as Herschell's successor at Trinity Chapel, John Street, Marylebone, in 1864, and was also the brother-in-law of Schönberger. As a schoolboy, Saphir was influenced by Israel's national history, and later the work of Rabinowitz in Russia inspired him to consider the national aspect of the Jewish question. Although catholic in his attitudes, his sympathies lay with the evangelical school of thought, and he provided theological justification for the retention by Hebrew Christians of traditional Jewish customs, as well as believing that, in due course, Israel would become the center of the divine kingdom on earth. He was one of the founding members of the HCA in 1866 and supported various initiatives for the establishment of a national Jewish church. In presiding over the London Council for Rabinowitz in the 1880s, he implicitly supported the use by Hebrew Christians of Jewish ritual in worship. Saphir, in sum, can be characterized as an advocate of the ethnic, institutional, theological, and liturgical independence of British Hebrew Christians, while pursuing his ministry to the Gentile church in the second half of the nineteenth century.

### **Mark John Levy**

The inaugural conference of the International Hebrew Christian Alliance, held in London in 1925, was the culmination of the vision and endeavor of Mark John Levy, who was born in London in 1855. His support for the retention by Jewish Christians of national customs became apparent in 1887, only three years after Joseph Rabinowitz founded the Jewish Christian congregation Israelites of the New Covenant in Kishinev, in southwestern Russia. In the 1890s, Levy established in London the Christian Jews' Patriotic Alliance, whose members declared Jewish Christian national and social freedom in the gospel and attempted to revive the Hebrew national branch of the church so that they might give a corporate testimony of faith in Christ to their unconverted Jewish brethren and provide centers of refuge, counsel, and comfort for Jews who had already confessed their faith in Jesus or were prepared to do so under scriptural conditions. He proposed the publication of a periodical for those Hebrew Christians who were flourishing in the community of law and grace, and he encouraged Jewish Christians to be circumcised, to celebrate the Jewish festivals, including Passover and the Feast of Tabernacles, and to commemorate the rites and ceremonies of Israel.

As a supporter of the incorporation into Jewish Christianity of as much ceremonial law as was consistent with belief in Christ and the doctrine of salvation through grace alone, he advocated the ethnic, institutional, theological, and liturgical independence of Jewish Christians in late nineteenth-century Britain, but his far-sighted vision was not supported by the vast majority of Hebrew Christians, and it was left to a new generation of believers to put his ideas into practice during the early years of the following century. Levy was able to incorporate the concept of what would later be defined as Messianic Judaism into Hebrew Christian discourse in the



1890s, and he was supported for the first time, in the second half of the nineteenth century, by leading Gentile Anglicans who acknowledged the freedom of Jewish Christians to be faithful to their national customs.

### **George Francis Popham Blyth and George Herbert Box**

Foremost among these Gentile supporters was the High Church Anglican bishop in Jerusalem, George Francis Popham Blyth, who was born in Beverley, Yorkshire. He believed that the revival of the primitive, catholic church was necessary as the perfect type of the church. The Jew could not, as a result of the missionary distinction imposed by Christ, be incorporated into any Gentile form of Christianity. There would always be the Jew and the Gentile in the communion of the catholic church, as well as all the other branches of the true vine. When the Jew began to see his promise in Christ, he would mold into his national liturgy the rites and ceremonies which were his and which the Gentiles would not prohibit. The church taught both the Old and New Testaments and the revival of the church of the Hebrews could not be an English society question; it must be the faithful effort of the whole church.

Bishop Blyth shared his vision of a Jewish Christian community and church at Jerusalem in 1900 with George Herbert Box, co-editor of *Church and Synagogue*, periodical of the Parochial Missions to the Jews at Home and Abroad. At the end of the nineteenth century, Box was one of the few leading Anglicans in Britain who believed that Hebrew Christians should not be incorporated into a Gentile form of Christianity but should maintain Jewish rites and ceremonies in a national liturgy of their own. The vision he set before both Jews and Christians was the establishment of an international hierarchy for a church of the Hebrews. A metropolitan of Jerusalem would appoint bishops in the “colonies of the dispersion,” and a bishop in London would exercise control over the Hebrew Christian congregations in Britain, which would be supplied with new forms of Hebrew services and prayers. Box’s ideal included a guild of Hebrew Christians, which would form the nucleus of a Jewish Christian community and church in London, and a Hebrew Christian liturgiological society which would hold experimental services in the East End. Ultimately, a Hebrew Christian church would secure for the Jewish people the “supreme place” in the religious world. Although his vision was not realized in late nineteenth-century Britain, he can be characterized as an advocate of the ethnic, institutional, theological, and liturgical independence of Hebrew Christians. His proposals for a Hebrew Christian church met with a negative response from the LSPCJ but elicited from one of its leaders a *via media*—denominational Hebrew Christian congregations—which bore fruit in the first quarter of the twentieth century.



## Conclusion

The majority of Jewish believers in nineteenth-century Britain preferred to worship in Gentile denominational churches and can be characterized as supporters of Hebrew Christian ethnic and institutional independence. They desired to be free of what they viewed as Judaistic legalism and feared that the observance of “days and ordinances”

would lead to the formation of new sects. Several Jewish Christian leaders and their supporters, however, debated the ideological and practical implications of incorporating into Hebrew Christianity as much ceremonial law as was consistent with belief in Christ and the doctrine of salvation through grace alone. These pioneers can be characterized as advocates of the theological and liturgical independence of Hebrew Christianity and of what would later be defined as Messianic Judaism. Their initiatives established the nineteenth-century ideological root on which twentieth-century practical Messianic Judaism would grow; this supports the view that the formative period of the modern concept of Messianic Judaism in Britain should be located not at the end of the nineteenth century but at its beginning.<sup>2</sup>

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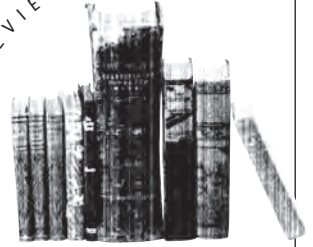
Michael Darby (Ph.D., University of Wales) has had an interest in the history of Jewish-Christian relations for three decades. He is a private tutor and the author of *The Emergence of the Hebrew Christian Movement in Nineteenth-Century Britain*.  
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<sup>2</sup> Further research and reflection will illuminate this contention and fill out the picture of the major themes of the Hebrew Christian movement. As Kai Kjær-Hansen suggested in *Mishkan*, no. 27 (1997), further academic work on the history of this movement will give us a better understanding of today's situation.

Michael Rydelnik. *The Messianic Hope: Is the Hebrew Bible Really Messianic?* Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2010, xviii, 197 pp., \$19.99, hardback.



BOOK REVIEWS



Michael Rydelnik joins a small, but important, group of evangelical scholars in approaching messianic prophecy from the standpoint of its “compositional strategies” as reflected in the canonical text and in the Old Testament’s own innerbiblical exegesis of earlier texts. This approach is associated with John Sailhamer and is also followed by Seth Postell (see his article elsewhere in this issue). The Torah, and the entire Tanakh, is seen by these scholars as a deliberately eschatological and messianic book, designed to point us to our need for a coming Messiah and Deliverer. This approach has not always been warmly welcomed by other evangelical scholars, but certainly for those in the field of Jewish missions, it is one to which we should pay attention and with which we should interact. Specifically, Rydelnik argues for the idea that “the Hebrew Bible has specific predictions of the Messiah” as opposed to the notion that “the messianic prophecies are merely a form of general promise” (p. 1).

Chapter one introduces the topic and gives a helpful historical survey of evangelical scholarship which, in Rydelnik’s view, has moved away from a messianic interpretation (names such as Tremper Longman III, Klyne Snodgrass, Larry Hurtado, John Walton, Daniel Block, Herbert Bateman IV, and others make their appearance here). Rydelnik underscores that not only does the scriptural evidence lead to the conclusion that

by **Richard A. Robinson**

the Old Testament is a messianic book, but such a view also provides the “most biblical apologetic” (p. 8) for Jesus’ messiahship, gives us confidence in the Bible as the inspired Word of God, and is the basis for identifying Jesus as the Messiah.

Chapter two is a much broader survey of Old Testament scholarship vis-à-vis messianic prophecy, and indeed this fine overview can provide anyone interested with a reading list in the history of interpretation in this area. Seven illustrations clarify the various approaches described, and following Sailhamer, Rydelnik will argue for “direct fulfillment” as opposed to “progressive (epigenetic),” “midrash,” or “dual” fulfillments (and others as well). Note particularly that Rydelnik differs from Walter Kaiser’s widely-accepted and popular approach, worth stating because of Kaiser’s influence in the American evangelical world. However, even “direct fulfillment” requires nuancing, which will be explored in more depth in chapter seven (see below).

Chapter three delves into textual criticism, important because it is argued that the Masoretic Text reflects “post-Christian, rabbinic Judaism” (p. 36), in which some messianic texts receive a nonmessianic interpretation. Chapter

four explores innerbiblical exegesis, using the examples of the famous passages about Shiloh in Genesis 49, the rising star of Numbers 24, and the Deuteronomy 18 passage concerning the prophet like Moses.

Chapter five moves on to canonical perspectives, arguing that the shape of the entire Old Testament canon leads to a messianic reading, and in fact, how messianic import was a criterion for inclusion in the canon. Here is where the Old Testament's purpose becomes clear: "The significance of the canonical redaction of the Tanak is apparent. It was designed to teach its readers to be faithful to the Torah until the Messiah comes" (p. 68).

In chapter six, we come to the New Testament and messianic prophecy; the argument is that the New Testament approaches the Old Testament as a messianic book. This is unpacked in specifics in chapter seven, concerning the New Testament's use of the Old Testament, in which the author finds four kinds of fulfillments in view, exemplified by direct fulfillment in Matthew 2:5–6 (quoting Micah 5:2); typical fulfillment in Matthew 2:15 (quoting Hosea 11:1); applicational fulfillment in Matthew 2:16–18 (quoting Jeremiah 31:15); and summary fulfillment in Matthew 2:19–23 ("he will be called a Nazarene").

Chapter eight will be of special interest to those in Jewish ministry, as it concerns Rashi's influence on how messianic prophecy has been interpreted. The author believes Rashi's interpretive methods have made their way into Christian commentaries, with the result that the directly predictive hermeneutic has been sidelined in favor of other approaches. Particularly, "in order to refute Christian claims, Rashi made a significant shift in the meaning of peshat: he equated the simple meaning of the text with

the historical interpretation" (p. 116), rather than adopt the literary and messianic view. Rashi's exegetical decisions, accordingly, were made in the light of the theological controversy with Christianity. Genesis 3:15, Psalm 2, Isaiah 9:6, Isaiah 42:1–9, and Zechariah 6:9–15 are detailed examples of how, under Rashi's influence, the messianic interpretation fell out of favor, even among Christian scholars.

The final chapters give detailed exegeses of messianic prophecies from the three parts of the Hebrew canon: chapter nine treats Genesis 3:15 (Torah); chapter ten, Isaiah 7:14 (Prophets); and chapter eleven, Psalm 110 (Writings). A concluding chapter rounds out the book.

In evaluating this approach, two questions I would wish to ask in future conversations are as follows:

- Is the emphasis on direct fulfillment in any way undercut by the nuancing of that sort of fulfillment into four categories, only one of which is called "direct"?
- In looking for innerbiblical clues to support the readings for which Rydelnik argues, is it possible that we are finding patterns where they were not intended by the compiler/canon-maker/authors? And related to that, are we to understand that the original readers understood all the many innerbiblical connections adduced in support of the thesis?

The approach of *The Messianic Hope* is one that deserves more careful consideration than it has to date received, all the more so given its relevance to Jewish ministry. In addition, readers should also have a look at Postell's *Adam as Israel*, mentioned elsewhere in this issue,

for another perspective that comes from a similar standpoint. No matter one's views on messianic prophecy, there is a wealth of material in *The Messianic Hope* to ponder and from which to learn. The author is to be commended for its publication, and I hope the conversation will continue!

Melissa Sarah Weininger. "Imagining Jesus, Imagining Jews." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 2010.

Dissertations are a good way to find out what up-and-coming scholars are saying and, therefore, what students will shortly be hearing in the lecture halls.

Melissa Weininger is a post-doctoral fellow teaching in the Jewish Studies program at Rice University, in Houston, Texas. Her dissertation focuses on how three twentieth-century Yiddish and Hebrew writers utilized the figure of Jesus "in order to construct a modern, secular, Jewish identity" (p. iv). Though the Jesus they wrote about was quite different from the Christian understanding, these writers "most often did not have in mind a polemic against Christianity, but against Judaism. With their representations of Jesus, they sought to challenge traditional notions of Jewish identity and to suggest new ways of defining Jewishness in the modern world" (p. 2).

In contrast with some recent works on the same subject, Weininger draws out differences between those who wrote in Hebrew and those who utilized Yiddish. She also suggests that there is more continuity between modern and pre-modern Jewish representations of Jesus than often recognized.

Weininger explores the Hebrew writer A. A. Kabak; the Yiddish author

Sholem Asch; and finally, Uri Tzvi Grinberg, who wrote in both languages. Jesus emerges as a personage who is used "to represent, among other things, a search for an authentic, originary Jewishness, to offer an alternative to secular territorial Zionism, and to celebrate assimilation and Americanism" (p. 206). Conceiving Jesus as an ambivalent figure, these writers navigated the waters of their own identity, steering between "Jewish particularism and universal humanism" (p. 212).

While Weininger primarily focuses on issues of identity construction, I found myself wanting to read the works she treats also for their artistic and literary value—a good motivation for learning Yiddish and/or Hebrew!

This is an open-source dissertation, available as a free download at <http://gradworks.umi.com/3397295.pdf>.

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