

**PRIEST, KING OR PROPHET:
WERE THE JEWS EXPECTING THE MESSIAH,
AND DID THE EARLY CHRISTIANS THINK HE HAD COME?**

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Introduction

It is a pleasure for me to join those who remember and honor John Priest. During the early years of my scholarly career I knew him a little, in print and in person. In 1962 and 1963 as a graduate student I read his two articles on Qumran messianism in the *Journal of Biblical Literature*.¹ Later as a young professor who was engaging himself in the literature and history of the Jews in the Greco-Roman period, I had occasion to chat with him now and again at the Annual Meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature and American Academy of Religion. Still later, his annotated edition of the *Testament of Moses* dealt with an ancient Jewish text on which I had written and on which I had edited a collection of papers for the SBL.² Thus, over the years we walked some of the same ground, as student and professor and as colleagues. In honor of John I have chosen to speak this evening on a topic that occupied his attention in his *JBL* articles and his edition of the *Testament of Moses: A Priest, King, or Prophet: Were the Jews expecting the Messiah, and did the early Christians think he had come?*³

It has been a generally accepted piece of wisdom that at the time of Jesus, the Jews were expecting the Messiah. One conjures up pictures of a nation under the oppressive power of the Roman empire, longing for the freedom that its people believed they deserved as the covenant people of the one true God. God would fulfil that longing by sending the Messiah, the divinely anointed Davidic king, who would release Israel from its bondage, drive the Romans

into the sea, and establish the kingdom of God. What, in fact, happened was this: Jesus of Nazareth appeared, proclaiming that the kingdom of God had arrived in his deeds and words, he clashed with the Jewish religious authorities over matters relating to the Torah, and he was crucified at their instigation. Subsequently, most of the Jewish people rejected the Christian proclamation that Jesus the Messiah had risen from the dead, and eventually the Land of Israel went up in flames when militant Jews tried to overthrow Roman power by their own means. The Jews had expected the wrong kind of Messiah, and they missed the real one when he came. Thereafter, with their land and Temple devastated, they shed their messianic expectations, and Judaism became exclusively a religion of the Torah. It would go its own way, bereft of the vibrant religious dynamic that informed and fueled the Christ-centered faith of Christianity, the true Israel.

During the next fifty minutes, I am going to deconstruct this myth of Christian origins and the stereotypes that support it. In so doing, I invite you inside the Jewish religion for an empathic look at the remarkable diversity of its attitudes about the Torah and the Messiah. Then we can look again at the reasons why some Jews accepted Jesus as the Messiah and why most of the others did not.

Covenant and Torah in Early Judaism

For Jews of the first century, Torah *was* central. However, not as an isolated set of commandments, but as an integral part of the covenant between God and Israel.⁴ Yahweh had chosen Israel as a special people and delivered them from slavery in Egypt. At Mount Sinai, God laid out the nation=s reciprocal obligations to this divine election. Thus, Torah was not simply Law to be obeyed. It was divine instruction regarding the life that a thankful and faithful people

were to live as their obligation to the God who had called them into covenant. Covenantal reciprocity took another turn. God promised to bless those who obeyed divine Torah with health and a long life, fertility, and freedom from foreign oppression. Conversely, disobedience would bring the curses of the covenant: sterility, sickness, premature death, and harassment by their enemies. This understanding of covenant and Torah did not mean that individuals, or the people collectively, had to live perfect lives. Repentance and the atonement it effected would restore the blessings of the covenant to a sinful people who were suffering the covenantal curses. So, the covenant was a bilateral, legally binding agreement between Yahweh and Israel, initiated by a gracious God, accepted by a grateful nation, and administered in justice by that same God for better or for worse, depending on the faithfulness or the disobedience of the people.

This was the theory, the theological undergirding of Israel's self-understanding as the people of God, spelled out in Deuteronomy, other books of the Pentateuch, and the Prophets. But how, in fact, was it administered? How did God *up there* relate to Israel *down here*? Who were the agents of divine activity? What did they do or what were they expected to do?

Kings, Prophets, and Priests

For many of you it will come as no surprise that God's agents were prophets, priests, and kings. What might surprise some of you is that the Bible refers to all of these as *Messiahs*.⁶ But let's define our term. In Hebrew the verb *mashach* means to anoint—to pour, or rub on oil. This rather messy process was the way that Israelite kings and high priests were inducted into office. As a result, the king was called *meshiach Yahweh*, *Yahweh's Anointed One*,⁷ and the high priest was designated as *hakohen hammashiach*, *The Anointed Priest*.⁸ Of course, this language and the ceremony that it designated involved more than the application of a perfumed

colloid. It was a symbolic act that deputized and empowered the anointee as God=s chosen agent on earth. The anointee was the appointee. The anointed *king* was the vicar, the stand-in for the heavenly *King*. Endowed with the spirit of divine wisdom and might, he was to administer the Kingdom or reign of God with justice and equity. The anointed *priest* presided over the Temple rituals that atoned for sin and that lifted the people=s praise and thanksgiving to the throne room of the heavenly King. Of God=s anointed *prophets* we will hear more presently. My point, for the moment, is this: the Hebrew term *mashiach*, which we transliterate AMessiah,@ originally designated not a future individual, but a present, divinely appointed human agent: the reigning monarch of Israel or the presiding high priest. In ancient Israel the Messiah had already come.

In the year 587 B.C.E., when the Babylonians overran the kingdom of Judah, all of this changed. The royal dynasty founded by David came to an end, and the Jerusalem high priesthood no longer had a sanctuary in which to function. As a result, there were some important innovations in Israel=s religious life and thought. From the early decades of the Babylonian Exile on, diversity was a hallmark of Israelite religious, social, and political thought.

On the one side were the royalists, the restorationists. The people in exile who gathered and preserved the prophecies of Micah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel included in these collections the oracles that the prophets had uttered concerning the reigning Davidic monarchs. Because the prophetic word was valid, the Davidic dynasty would *have* to be restored. Thus texts like Isaiah 7, 9, and 11, Jeremiah 23, and Ezekiel 34 were understood as promises that pertained to a *future* heir of David, who would reign over a restored nation. Similarly, Nathan=s oracle about God=s everlasting covenant with David in 2 Samuel 7 and royal psalms like Psalms

2, 45, and 89 were cherished as *promises*, and as descriptions of the coming scion of the Davidic house. After the return from Babylon, the prophets Haggai and Zechariah believed that Zerubbabel, a prince of the house of David and the governor of Judah, would be the next king (Hag 2:23; Zech 4). In fact, Zechariah referred to Joshua the high priest and Zerubbabel as the two Anointed Ones of God's anointed priest and king (Zech 4:14).

But if the preservation of the oracles of Micah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel attest a belief in the restoration of the Davidic line, other religious heirs of Isaiah had a different viewpoint. Their oracles are preserved in chapters 40-66 of what we now call the Book of Isaiah. Here among all their glowing promises of Israel's future, one looks in vain for a single reference to the restoration of the Davidic dynasty. In chapter 55, the only place where David is mentioned, he has been demoted from king to a prince,⁴ and the covenant with his dynasty (2 Sam. 7) is applied to the nation as a whole. In addition, oracles of Isaiah that had originally referred to the Davidic king were now applied to a unnamed figure known as the Servant of Yahweh.⁵ He looks much more like a prophet than a king and, indeed, a prophet who would suffer in behalf of his people. Thus, it is not surprising that in Isaiah 61 the prophet proclaims, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has *anointed* me to bring good tidings to the afflicted." Yahweh's Anointed One is a *prophet*.⁵ But things are even more complicated. In chapter 45, the prophet announces, "Thus says Yahweh to *his anointed*, to *Cyrus*, whose right hand I have grasped to subdue nations before him" (v 1). Here Yahweh's Messiah is Cyrus, king of the Persians, whose victory over the Babylonians and edict of liberation would allow the Judeans to return to their homeland.

So here is the picture by the year 400 B.C.E., when there was no Davidic king on the

throne. The prophetic traditions that would come to constitute a major part of Israel's Bible contained oracles that were seen to predict the restoration of the Davidic dynasty. The Psalms, which would serve as the hymn book of the Second Temple, contained royal oracles that must have been sung in the hope that the monarchy would be restored. At the same time, the prophetic corpus contained a major block of text, subsumed under the oracles of Isaiah, which undercut the royal oracles and foresaw a future without a Davidic king. Opposing attitudes toward the priesthood also existed. Zechariah supported the high priestly credentials of Joshua, while others appear not to have been so certain (Zech 3). Arguments about the priesthood would continue until the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E.

Israelite History in the Greco-Roman Period

And now, as we totter on the brink of what many consider to be genuine Israelite messianism, I want to pause to review the history of the Jewish people in the Greco-Roman period (330 B.C.E.-70 C.E.). This history provides a context for understanding Jewish theologies of salvation, including what is usually called Amessianism.⁶ In this review, I return to my discussion of covenantal theology, in order to show both how it was used to interpret historical events and how it was discarded by the authors of some apocalyptic texts.

The meteoric rise of Alexander the Great in the late fourth century brought an end to the Persian empire, under whose rule Israel had lived in relative peace for almost two hundred years. The brilliant victories of the Macedonian warrior and the military activities and political policies of some of his successors would spell real trouble for the Jewish people. As the successors, the so-called Diadochoi, contested one another's rights as Alexander's legitimate successors, Palestine exchanged hands seven times in the twenty-one years after Alexander's death

(323B312 C..E.). The most notorious among the dynasty of Macedonian kings was Antiochus IV AEpiphanes,@ who forbade the practice of the Jewish religion in 167 B.C.E. and persecuted those who observed the Torah.

One hundred years later, Rome entered the scene. The Holy Land was now be ruled by triumvirs, legates, and governors and the armies they commanded. After 130 years of Roman rule, the Jews revolted. In the Jewish War of 66B74 C.E., the armies of Vespasian and Titus devastated the land and demolished the Holy City and its Temple. Sixty years later, in 135, the emperor Hadrian crushed a second and final revolt.

Problems and Solutions

These were times of great physical and spiritual trauma for the Jewish people. Alongside the destruction of their homes, the loss of their families, and the dissolution of their social and religious institutions, there were nagging, existential questions. How could the rulers and armies of the idolatrous Greeks and Romans devastate and humiliate the covenant people of the one true God? Had the people sinned massively and in some profound sense? If so, might they still repent and again experience the covenantal blessings? Or was the covenant kaput? If their sin was *not* so great, where was the justice of the God of the covenant? Would their God reset the balance of justice, vindicate their faithfulness, and punish their enemies?

These questions were answered in two ways. Employing the historical scheme of Deuteronomy, some Jewish religious leaders of the Greco-Roman period claimed that Israel was, indeed, drenched in sin. The people had violated divine TorahCmassively and in a variety of ways. The Greek and Roman armies, like that of the Babylonians centuries earlier, were executors of the justice of the God of the covenant, who, once again, was shaving with a hired

razor. But deliverance would come. The covenantal blessings would return when the people turned from their sinful ways and walked in the path of righteousness, heeding the commandments of the Most High. Texts written pseudonymously in the name of Moses narrated the recent history of Israel according to the scheme of the last chapters of Deuteronomy, which were understood to prophesy the present time. These accounts concluded with the promise of a return to the bliss of Paradise or even Israel=s ascent to heaven. Penitential prayers, some of them dating back to the Persian period, maintained that even after the purging experience of the Exile, Israel had not shaken off the covenantal curses that clung to her.⁶ But the pious who uttered these prayers believed that the repentance they expressed would eventually bring about the return of God=s favor.

Other texts, written in the name of the exilic sage Daniel (the biblical Book of Daniel), or the primordial holy man Enoch (*1 Enoch*), rejected a simplistic application of the Deuteronomic scheme. Israel was more righteous than it was sinful. While the sins of the people had brought on disaster, they got more than they deserved. Alternatively, innocent humanity was the victim of undeserved violence whose cause was a revolt in heaven. The pagan kings and generals who devastated the earth were the agents of demonic forces=Cheavenly beings who had rebelled against God. Sickness and suffering and even human sin itself were caused by a horde of evil spirits that roamed the earth wreaking havoc.⁷ Thus, the world as they experienced it was the arena of a cosmic battle between the forces of good and evil, God and Satan. But the faithful would be rescued. The present evil age, dominated by the demonic forces, was near its end. A final divine judgment was at hand. The profound injustice that permeated the universe was about to be reversed. God would reward the righteous and punish the wicked. Divine righteousness

would prevail, finally, fully, and forever. As some put it, the kingdom of God was at hand.

And so we return to our prior question: How would God, the *heavenly* King, touch the covenantal people *on earth*. What or who were the agents of divine justice, salvation, and healing. In the words of our topic, "Were the Jewish People Expecting the Messiah?" The answer in a couple of sentences—which I shall expand into most of the remainder of this talk—is as follows. *The Jews* were not expecting *the* Messiah. Jews of different persuasions envisioned and anticipated different sorts of agents of divine deliverance. These varieties of belief focused on different problems to be solved, and they drew their inspiration and authority from different biblical texts and religious traditions. Still others among the Jews—we might call them the fat cats of society—had a different appraisal of their situation. Life was comfortable, and there was nothing from which to be delivered. The Deuteronomic scheme actually validated their comfortable existence as divine blessing. So, let's unpack this remarkable variety of Jewish religious expression.

Messiahs, Prophets, and Teachers

We begin with the familiar. In the Greco-Roman period, prophetic oracles about the Davidic king and psalmic celebrations of his virtues were read as descriptions of the future king. If the Davidic dynasty was thought to be established *forever*, (2 Sam 7:12-16; Psalm 89:35-37), and there was presently no reigning monarch, these texts *had* to refer to a future king. That such a king should be called *Mesiah Yahweh* was natural. The Anointed of Yahweh was the title of the Davidic monarch in biblical times.

The most detailed *job* description of the *future* Davidic king appears in the 17th of the *Psalms of Solomon*, a collection of poems written in the mid-1st century B.C.E. in response to the

Roman conquest of the Holy Land. In good Deuteronomic fashion, the author identifies this conquest as punishment for Israel's sin, but also in the spirit of Deuteronomy, he predicts that God will destroy the arrogance of the conqueror and rescue Israel from foreign domination. Different from Deuteronomy, however, the author asserts that divine judgment will be enacted by the son of David, the Anointed of Yahweh (in the original Hebrew text *Meshiach Yahweh*, and in its Greek translation, *Christos Kyriou*, the Anointed of the Lord (17:36[32]).⁸ The characteristics and activities of this king are described in language from biblical royal texts (Psalm 2, 2 Samuel 7 and Psalm 89, Isaiah 11, and Ezekiel 34. He is a member of David's everlasting royal line.⁹ A divinely endowed warrior, he will expel the Romans from the Land of Israel after crushing them with a rod of iron and blasting them with the word of his mouth.¹⁰ He will gather the dispersed tribes of Israel and shepherd them in a spirit of justice.¹¹ As Yahweh is king, so is the son of David—the enactor of God's eternal reign on earth (vv 41B46 [47B51]). This three-page text takes us into the minds of Jews who anchored their hopes for the future in their belief in a future Davidic king. We can see how they tied this messianic belief to biblical texts, and we may sense how these texts must have simmered in the cauldron of Jewish nationalistic covenant theology. The psalm also enables us to understand the reason for positing a king as God's agent. The political problem of Pompey the Great calls forth the expectation of a Davidic king, who, according to Psalm 2, would subdue the kings of the earth, smashing them with a rod of iron and crushing them like a potter's vessel.

The testimony of *Psalms of Solomon* 17 does not stand alone. Several manuscripts from the Dead Sea Scrolls, found at a site called Qumran, also attest hope in a Davidic King who will crush the enemies of the Jewish people.¹² They, too, draw on texts like 2 Samuel 7 and Psalm 2.

One of these texts, notoriously paraded in the media as the ‘Pierced Messiah’ text, seems in fact to describe the Messiah piercing his enemies.¹³ So, yes, some Jews of the first centuries awaited a Davidic warrior king, who would defeat their Roman overlords. But that is only one part of the picture.

Several passages in the Qumran Scrolls envision *more* than one Anointed One—specifically the ones of Aaron and Israel—an anointed priest as well as an anointed king. It is a topic on which John Priest wrote in one of his *JBL* articles.¹⁴ The expectation of the double Messiahs should not surprise us. After all, the high priest was known as *hakohen hammashiach*, ‘the Anointed Priest.’ Moreover, as we have seen, the explicit pairing occurs already in Zechariah’s reference to Joshua and Zerubbabel as ‘the sons of oil’ (Zech 4:14). However, what is particularly noteworthy in the Qumran texts is the superiority of the anointed priest over the anointed king. In the community of priests that produced these texts, the priestly takes precedence over the political. Moreover, the community’s circumstances called forth a particular formulation. The Qumranites strongly opposed what they considered to be the sins and corruption of the priesthood in Jerusalem and especially its leader, the reigning high priest, and so it is not surprising that a properly anointed high priest played an important role in their views of the future.

We learn more about the anointed priest in another text, the so-called *Testament of Levi*, a Christian text in its present form, which is based on Jewish sources.¹⁵ It alleges to be the last words of the son of Jacob who came to be the founder of Israel’s priestly line. The description of the future high priest follows a long account of a series of wicked priests, who had polluted the Holy Place (chaps. 16-18). The pattern, then, is the same as in the *Psalms of Solomon*. There

Pompey the godless ruler must be overcome by the righteous Davidic ruler. Here the experience of wicked priests triggers the hope for an ideal future high priest. One detail in the description of the priest calls for comment. He is portrayed in language drawn from the description of the Davidic king in Isaiah 11.¹⁶ In the *Testament of Levi*, there are no references to a royal Messiah. Instead, hues from Isaiah's royal palette color the portrait of the anointed *Priest*.¹⁷ One final observation about the *Testament of Levi* is important. Although the Qumran Scrolls include several copies of one of the sources of this text, the so-called Aramaic Levi Document, the Greek *Testament of Levi* is, in its present form, a Christian composition of the second century C.E., and its description of the future priest contains a reference to the baptism of Jesus. That is, for the author of this text, the account of Jesus's baptism in Mark 1 is the story of his installation as high priest. Even though Mark's text employs language from the Davidic Psalm 2.¹⁸ Thus, for some early Christians, a Messiah implied high priest and not king. We'll put that into our Christian mix a little later.

But returning now to our discussion of Jewish messianism, there is yet another complication, even in the Qumran texts. In the Community Rule, we are told that certain things will be in place until there come *the Prophet* and the Anointed Ones of Aaron and Israel (1QS 9:11) (Yes, you heard correctly: prophet, priest, and king.) Among the celebrities of the end time will be not only two Anointed Ones, but the unique prophet whom Moses has predicted in Deuteronomy 18.¹⁹ While he is not designated here as Anointed, he plays an important enough role to be listed first in the triad. If we follow the pattern suggested in our discussions of the King and Priest, we may surmise that the author refers to a divine spokesman, who will give the final word on God's will, correcting current misunderstandings or obscurities.

We must pause here for a moment. Alongside the half-truth that: AThe Jews were expecting the Messiah,@ there is another, namely, that after Malachi prophecy was dead in Israel.²⁰ In fact, however, numerous people in Greco-Roman Israel claimed to be inspired spokesmen of the LordCby whatever name they were called.²¹ Some saw visions and others claimed to present authoritative interpretations of the Torah and the prophets. The half-truth was invented by those who didn=t like what these people said and dismissed their prophetic credentials. Later, Christians with a great investment in the uniqueness of Jesus of Nazareth claimed that until John the Baptist, the land was devoid of a word from the Lord. Evidence for prophetic, or prophet-like activity in Greco-Roman Israel is diverse and massive, and some of these people were seen as figures of the end-time. In Daniel 12 there are Athe wise, who bring many to righteousness@ (12:3), the leaders of the righteous community who resist the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes, and who are designated with language from the last Servant Song in Isaiah 52B53.²² Language from the Servant Songs is used as a self-designation by the author or authors of three of the Qumran Hymns (1QH 15[7]:10; 16[8]:36; cf. Isa 50:4; 1QH 12(4):8, 22B23; cf, Isa 53:3). Perhaps the hymns were written by Athe Teacher of Righteousness,@ the leader of the Qumran community, who claimed to be an inspired interpreter of the Torah and the Prophets. In any case, these prophetic/teacher figures were seen as agents of God and mediators of salvation. Since right conduct led to covenantal blessings, those who taught how to live right were agents of salvation.

The Righteous Sufferer as an Agent of Divine Deliverance

Finally, in the category of human agents of divine deliverance we should include the righteous sufferer. Such a figure appears in at least three Jewish texts from the Greco-Roman

period. The first is the *Testament of Moses*, a rewritten form of the last chapters of Deuteronomy whose composition John Priest dated to the early decades of the common and a first edition of which I think can be dated two hundred years earlier to the time of Antiochus IV.²³ In any case, it employs the Deuteronomic scheme to recount Israelite history from the time of Moses to the author=s own time. At the height of Israel=s sin and in the midst of the severe distress that constitutes the curses of the covenant, a Levite who is given the code name Taxo calls on his seven sons to die with him for the sake of the Torah. Their innocent deaths trigger God=s wrath against the oppressor and bring on the salvation of Israel. Another version of the story appears in the seventh chapter of Second Maccabees. In the midst of the Antiochan persecution, which again represents God=s wrath on sinful Israel, a mother and her seven sons die for the sake of the Torah, invoking God=s punishment on Antiochus. His overweening pride is punished as the army of Judas Maccabeus brings deliverance to Israel. In this story, the deaths of the righteous martyrs and their vindication through resurrection are depicted in part through language drawn from the last Servant song of Second Isaiah.²⁴ In another version of this story the author of Fourth Maccabees employs the concept of vicarious expiation, which reflects both Greek ideas and the notion of vicarious death found in Isaiah 52B53.²⁵

Angels and Other Heavenly Beings

Thus far I have been discussing *human* agents of divine deliverance: a king from the line of David; a priest from the tribe of Levi; a prophet, and a variety of teachers and sages; and the suffering righteous. Again, this is only part of the picture. Human agents deal with problems of human making. When evil and suffering are attributed to *supernatural* forces, such as rebel angels and demons, one posits the counter-activity of *heavenly* beings. This is particularly the

case in apocalyptic literature.

A text known as the *Book of Enoch* or *1 Enoch*, attributes violence and other forms of evil in the world to a heavenly revolt by two hundred angels, who mate with mortal women and beget giants who devastate the earth. God's response to this victimization of the human race and its environment is to send his four high angels (Sariel, Raphael, Gabriel, and Michael) to destroy the giants, imprison the angels, heal the earth, and rescue humanity. Michael is depicted as a heavenly high priest, commissioned to purify the polluted earth. Because the author thinks that the world has been polluted, he posits the need of a priest, but because he believes that the Jerusalem cult has been defiled by the Temple priests, he posits the presence of a *heavenly* high priest. Again, situation shapes the formulation of the solution.

The Book of Daniel also presents a dualistic interpretation of evil and its solution. Antiochus IV, who has persecuted the Jewish people and outlawed the Torah and the Jerusalem cult, is the earthly operative of a rebel heavenly figure. According to chapter 12, at the time of the end, God will send the angel Michael, who this time is seen as a *judicial* figure, a defending attorney, who stands up for the people of God and opposes the demonic power behind Antiochus. Daniel's vision in chapter 7 offers a related scenario. The kingdoms of this world are depicted as horrific beasts that rise from the chaos of the primordial deep. The heavenly court goes into session. The enthroned Deity and his myriads of Holy Ones condemn the fourth beast and its last king, Antiochus IV, and blast them with divine fire. Then, riding on the clouds of heaven comes one who, in contrast to the beasts, has the appearance of a human being—*one like a son of man*.⁶ It is either Michael or another high angel, but one with a unique office. He is brought to the heavenly court room and receives authority and power to govern the earthly kingdom of

God=s people and to exercise divine sovereignty over the kingdoms of the earth. Thus in Daniel the profound injustice experienced by God=s faithful people is overcome in a final judgment presided over by the Deity and others of the heavenly court. Michael serves as attorney in chapter 12, and in chapter 7 he or his counterpart is enthroned as king, the administrator of God=s just reign. In their status and functions, these heavenly beings do not differ all that much from the Davidic Messiah in the *Psalms of Solomon*. The principal difference is that demonic evil requires intervention by a heavenly agent.

The judgment scene in Daniel 7 is foundational for other Jewish speculation about the end time and for the church=s early interpretations of Jesus. In a text from around the turn of the era, the so-called Parables or Similitudes of Enoch (*1 Enoch 37B71*), we hear again about the son of man. Here the scene from Daniel 7 is combined with language from biblical royal oracles about the son of David, specifically Psalm 2 and Isaiah 11, and with material from the Servant Songs of Isaiah.²⁶ What emerges is the portrait of a heavenly figure, who existed before the creation of the world, who is enthroned in heaven, not after the judgment as in Daniel 7, but in order to enact that judgment. This heavenly figure receives the name *Ason of man* from Daniel, *Athe Chosen one* and *Athe Righteous one* from the Servant songs, and *Athe Anointed One* from the Davidic texts. He is the champion of the righteous and chosen of Israel and the judge of their enemies, *Athe kings and the mighty.* Some important facts emerge from this picture. *First*, the author=s transformation of his sources. Texts about the Davidic king are applied to a heavenly figure. Texts about a suffering Servant focus on the glorification of that Servant and refer to a heavenly figure who does not suffer, but is the *champion* of the suffering righteous. The enthronement of Daniel=s son of man coincides with the enthronement of the Davidic king

and the exaltation of the Servant of Yahweh. *Secondly*, the author shapes the text to fit his situation. The realities are political. The enthroned, anointed heavenly king confronts the kings and rulers of this world. Royal oppression calls for a kingly opponent. *Thirdly*, the nature of evil transforms the source material. The kings and the mighty are demonic operatives; hence their royal opponent is a heavenly being.

Finally, we should note that in some Jewish texts from the Greco-Roman period, salvation comes not through an agent, but by the direct activity of the Deity. Chapters 1B5 of the Book of Enoch are one such example.

Summary

We return to our initial question. Were the Jews expecting the Messiah? Nnnnnnooo! At least not in the sense that this truism is usually put forth. The seven-hundred year history of Israel from the sixth century B.C.E. to the second century C.E. was often marked by foreign domination and by suffering and distress. Some made sense of this by acknowledging national sin and calling for repentance. Others insisted that the trouble was unjust and appealed for the divine judgment that would set the world aright again. When the crisis was sufficiently acute, one spoke of a present evil age, dominated by demonic powers, which God would terminate by ushering in a new age.

Often the new dispensation was tied to the appearance of a special divine agent, whose functions were appropriate to the crisis. A new anointed Davidic King to destroy the kings of the earth and institute justice and the reign of God. An anointed high priest to replace a corrupt and polluted, or illegitimate high priest. A prophet or special teacher to speak for God when God's word seemed unclear. In a few cases, salvation is envisioned through the innocent death of a

righteous person, who bears the punishment that should befall the sinful nation. In times of acute crisis, one ascribed evil and suffering to demonic powers and posited the coming of a heavenly priest, or a king and warrior, or even the epiphany of the Deity rather than a delegated agent of divine deliverance.

Thus the variety of Jewish speculation about God=s future was broad and diverse, always rooted in the traditions of Israel=s past, but reshaped and honed to speak to the present. *The* Jews were not expecting *the* Messiah; different Jews had different kinds of expectations. This point is important. The early churchCthose Jews who saw Jesus as a special and unique figureC proclaimed its own wide-ranging transformations of the traditions. Various of these transformations were understandable and a good fit for some Jews, but strange and unacceptable to others. In the time that remains, I shall suggest some of the ways in which this worked out.

Early Christian Interpretations of Jesus of Nazareth

First century Christians understood Jesus of Nazareth to be, variously, the realization of *all* the expectations that I have sketched for you. He was, first of all the Messiah, the son of David, though this ascription is rarely explicit in the New Testament. In addition to Matthew=s and Luke=s infancy narratives (Matt 1B2; Luke 1B2), the Davidic identification occurs a few times in the synoptic gospels, mainly in Matthew (Matt 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30-33||Mark 10:47B48; 18:38B39; Matt 21:9, 15.). Paul mentions it once, in a quotation of a traditional creedal formula (Rom 1:3). It appears a couple of times in the Book of Revelation (3:7; 5:5; 22:16). In one passage in the synoptic gospels, Jesus appears to challenge the notion that the Messiah was the son of David (Matt 22:41B46||Mark 12:35B37; Luke 20:45B47)..

But someone will say, what about all the references to Jesus as *Christos*, Messiah, and

what about the name itself, *Iesous Christos*. It is precisely at this point that our survey of the Jewish texts warns us not to jump to quick conclusions. In the Jewish tradition, *Mashiach* and *Christos* had different connotations. Is it possible that sometimes Jesus= status as the Anointed One implied that he was God=s high priest, who would replace an unsatisfactory priestly regime and sacrificial system? Clearly the Epistle to the Hebrews designates him as the heavenly high priest after the order of Melchizedek and anchors that claim in the words of Psalm 110. Do other New Testament quotations of Psalm 110 also imply a high priestly role? What of Paul=s quotation of the text with reference to Jesus= heavenly intercession (Rom 8:34)? What of Jesus= response to the High Priest: AYou will see the son of man seated at the right hand of power@ (Mark 14:62)? In the *Testament of Levi 18* and other early Christian sources, Jesus= baptism is his installation as God=s high priest.²⁷

The term AAnointed One@ designated another heavenly figure in Jewish literature, namely, Enoch=s son of man who sat on God=s throne and judged the persecutors of the righteous. In my view, this *particular* understanding of the expression Ason of man@ governs many of the New Testament citations of Daniel 7.²⁸ That is, AMessiah@ and heavenly Ason of man@ ascribe the same status and role to Jesus. He is the Lord=s AAnointed one@ by virtue of his resurrection and exaltation in heaven. Here we may come to the kernel of the matter. I suggest that one of the springboards for the early Christian designation of Jesus as Messiah was the post-Easter experience of him as a glorified heavenly being. For some Jews who embraced the notion of an exalted son of man/Messiah, the experience of the Risen Jesus could well have triggered messianic faith.

There is another aspect of this messianic faith. The Wisdom of Solomon, a Jewish text contemporary to the Parables of Enoch, depicts the career of a righteous teacher, who is condemned to death by those who do not accept his teaching, but who is then exalted in heaven. The biblical paradigm is

the suffering and exalted Servant of the Lord, but the description of the exalted one closely parallels that of Enoch=s son of man.²⁹ The story in the Wisdom of Solomon helped to shape the gospel stories of Jesus= passion and death.³⁰ It fit well. Jesus was a controversial teacher, and the evangelists believed that his resurrection vindicated the activity that led to his death. Quotations from the Servant songs and allusions to them are sprinkled throughout the Gospels and elsewhere in the New Testament. Other texts describe Jesus as the prophet like Moses, predicted in Deuteronomy and expected at Qumran.

As we move to the end of the first century, we find in the Book of Revelation a remarkable application to Jesus of the complex messianic theology found in the Parables of Enoch. The crucified Jesus is a glorified heavenly being to whom are ascribed traits of the Davidic Messiah, Daniel=s one like a son of man and, I think, the Isaianic Servant of the Lord.³¹ The uniqueness of Revelation lies in its identification of the risen Jesus as the Messiah and in its expectation that the Messiah will break the back of the Roman empire.

Let me summarize. We tend to define Jesus= messiahship with reference to his Davidic descent. But there are good reasons to suppose that early Christian messianism was, in part, rooted in the experience of the Risen Christ. This messianic faith reflected, and was nourished by, a wide range of Jewish theological traditions, some of them stemming from biblical texts, but all of them shaped and reshaped in the Jewish apocalyptic theologies of the Greco-Roman period.

First Century Jews and the Messianic Proclamation of the Church

This brings us to our final question: Why did the majority of first century Jews not accept the Christian proclamation that Jesus was Messiah. As you can guess by now, the answer is complex. And it is by not means clear. But here are some aspects and suggestions.

1. Some Jews awaited a militant Davidic Messiah who would shake off Roman rule. There is no evidence that Jesus opposed the Romans, although the superscription on the cross suggests that Pontius Pilate thought he was such a messianic pretender. In any case, in point of historical fact, Rome got the last

word.

2. As Paul suggests, the crucifixion itself was enough to put off potential Jewish believers. Why put one's faith in a dead man (1 Cor 1:23)? And why risk associating with a group whose founder was executed by a Roman governor? Why join the Julius and Ethel Rosenberg fan club?

3. The validity of Jesus' messiahship rested on the claim of his resurrection. One had to embrace the notion of a heavenly Messiah, or at least believe that someone unjustly put to death could be raised and vindicated for the reasons that led to his death. Not all Jews believed in a resurrection. For those who did *not*, the Romans had, in point of fact, had the last word. Even if one did believe in a resurrection, one had to believe that *Jesus* had risen from the dead. According to the New Testament, the risen Jesus did not make a lot of guest appearances, and with the exception of Paul, he appeared to his disciples and not to unbelievers.

4. For Jews who awaited a prophet in the end-time, developing traditions about the teaching activity of Jesus would not be very convincing, because these traditions often depicted Jesus taking what might be considered a lax attitude toward the Torah.

5. This brings me to a related point and my final one. A wide gap opened between Jewish religion and developing first-century Christianity. Torah was integral to Jewish covenantal theology. That Torah was divine instruction to be heeded was a fundamental pillar of Jewish religion. Conversely, belief in a Messiah was not indispensable to Jewish religion, as we have seen by now. In a fundamental way, the early church stood Jewish religion on its head. Christology *was* indispensable, but Torah need not be observed. Thus, it is not at all surprising that for most Jews, Christianity had no legitimate claim to its proclaimed identity as the true Israel. In fact, the paradox must have striking to many Jews. As the church became more and more a gentile community, it dispensed with the Torah, but it continued to claim that it was the true Israel. At the same time it anathematized ethnic Jews, who prized Torah but did not embrace the church's messianic faith.

Many in this audience have grown in the Christian Church and accept the New Testament as the right way to read the ancient Scriptures of Israel. This makes sense within the internal logic of the New Testament. Through the centuries, however, the Jewish people have found the center of their religion in the Torah and not in the messiahship of Jesus. I hope that my observations this evening will lead you to appreciate the fact that they have very understandable and defensible reasons for *their* interpretation of their ancestral religion.

Endnotes

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1. John F. Priest, "Mebaqer, Paqid, and the Messiah," *JBL* 81 (1962) 55B61; idem, "The Messiah and the Meal in 1QS," *JBL* 82 (1963) 95B100.
 2. Idem, "The Testament of Moses," in James H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (2 vols.; Garden City: Doubleday, 1983-85) 1:919B34; George W. E. Nickelsburg, *Resurrection, Immortality, and Eternal Life in Intertestamental Judaism* (HTS 26; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972) 28B31, 43B45, 97B102; (idem, *Resurrection Immortality and Eternal Life in Intertestamental Judaism and Early Christianity* [expanded ed.; HTS 56; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006] 42B46, 61B64, 124B30); George W. E. Nickelsburg, ed., *Studies on the Testament of Moses* (SBLSCS 4; Cambridge: Society of Biblical Literature, 1973); idem, *Jewish Literature Between the Bible and the Mishnah* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981) 80B83 (second edition; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005) 74B77.
 3. For a broader and more extensive treatment of this subject, see George W. E. Nickelsburg, *Ancient Judaism and Christian Origins: Diversity, Continuity, and Transformation* (Minneapolis: Fortress: 2004) 89B117. Most of the relevant primary texts can be found in George W. E. Nickelsburg and Michael E. Stone, *Faith and Piety in Early Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983/ Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1991) 161B96.
 4. In more detail, see Nickelsburg, *Ancient Judaism*, 29B60.
 5. See also 1 Kgs 19:16, where God commands Elijah to anoint Elisha as his prophetic successor. In fact, in v 19, Elijah throws his mantle over Elisha, and in 2 Kgs 2:9B16, Elisha requests and receives the spirit of Elijah.
 6. See Rodney A. Werline, *Penitential Prayer in Second Temple Judaism: The Development of a Religious Institution* (SBLEJL 13; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998).
 7. So also the pseudo-Mosaic *Book of Jubilees*, which employs and builds on Enochic traditions.
 8. Emending the Greek *christos kyrios* (The Anointed One, the Lord) to *christos kyriou*. Both forms of

the Greek would reproduce the same Hebrew.

9. Vv 4 (5); 1 Sam 7:12B14; Ps 89:3B4, 35B37.

10. Vv 22B25 (24B27); Isa 11:4; Ps 2:8B9.

11. V 40 (45); Ezek 34; v 37 (42); Isa 11:2.

12. For a discussion of these texts, see John J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star: The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Ancient Literature* (New York: Doubleday, 1995) 56B67.

13. On this text, see Lawrence H. Schiffman, *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York: Doubleday, 1994) 344B47.

14. For a much more recent discussion of these texts, see Collins, *Scepter and the Star*, 102B15

15. On the Aramaic Levi Document, see Jonas C. Greenfield, Michael E. Stone, and Esther Eshel, *The Aramaic Levi Document: Edition, Translation, Commentary* (SVTP 19; Leiden: Brill, 2004).

16. Cf. *T. Levi* 18:2 with Isa 11:3B4; *T. Levi* 18:5 with Isa 11:9; *T. Levi* 18:7 with Isa 11:2.

17. Several passages in the Aramaic Levi Document indicate, moreover, that this Jewish text itself was Leviticizing Davidic motifs. Language from the blessing of Judah (rather than Levi) is used with reference to Kohath, Levi=s son; see Greenfield, Stone, and Eshel, *Aramaic Levi Document*, 184B85. Similarly, like *T. Levi* 18:2, the prayer of Levi appears to draw on Isa 11:2; see *ibid.*, 128.

18. See Nickelsburg, *Faith and Piety*, 199B200.

19. For a text that implies this triad by quoting biblical passages that apply to these three figures, see 4Q174, so-called 4QTestimonia. On the eschatological prophet in the Qumran texts, see Collins, *Scepter*. 116B22.

20. For an expression of this idea, see Jos. *Ag. Ap* 1.40, who depicts the period of the prophets as stretching from Moses to Artaxerxes.

21. See Nickelsburg, *Ancient Judaism*, 96.

22. Nickelsburg, *Resurrection in Judaism and Early Christianity*, 38B41.

23. See above, n. 2.

24. Nickelsburg, *Resurrection in Judaism and Early Christianity*, 130B37.

25. See Nickelsburg, *Ancient Judaism*, 206, n. 56.

26. On the son of man in Daniel 7, the Parables of Enoch and other Jewish texts, as well as the New Testament, see George W. E. Nickelsburg, *A Son of Man*, @ *ABD* 6:137B50.

27. For these texts, see Nickelsburg, *Ancient Judaism*, 221B45.

28. Nickelsburg, *A Son of Man*, @ 142B49.

29. Nickelsburg, *Resurrection in Judaism and Early Christianity*, 67B118.

30. *Idem.*, 249B79.

31. Nickelsburg, *A Son of Man*, @ 148.