



The Association of Hebrew Catholics Lecture
Series 2021-2022

The Messiah of Israel

Talk 3. Prophecies of the Messiah, Part 1

Method for Understanding Prophecies of the Messiah

The prophecies and typological figures of the Messiah in the Old Testament will be examined from a canonical, patristic, and theological perspective to give a picture of the Messiah's identity and mission.

Canonical Method for Understanding Prophecies of the Messiah

Dei Verbum, §12:

“But, since Holy Scripture must be read and interpreted in the sacred spirit in which it was written, no less serious attention must be given to the content and unity of the whole of Scripture if the meaning of the sacred texts is to be correctly worked out. The living tradition of the whole Church must be taken into account along with the harmony which exists between elements of the faith.”

Jewish Understanding of the Messianic Prophecies

The Term Messiah

The word Messiah comes from the Hebrew *Mashiach*, which means “anointed one,” and was translated into Greek as *Christos*. “Messiah” became a common term for the object of this messianic expectation only in the later period of the Second Temple, one or two centuries before Christ. *Mashiach* (מָשִׁיחַ) is an adjectival noun derived from a passive participle of the verb “to anoint,” which in Hebrew is מָשַׁח (*mashach*).

Messiah

- The Old Testament references to the Messiah almost never use the term “Messiah.” When that term is actually used, it almost never directly refers to the messianic expectation, but is simply speaking of those who were anointed with holy oil in Israel, who were kings and high priests.

Isaiah 61:1

“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me,
because the LORD has *anointed* [*mashach*]
me.”

Messiah

- Since the Messiah was expected to restore the kingship of David and the priestly worship of Israel, he came to be considered as the supremely anointed one.
- The anointing with holy oil was associated with the Holy Spirit, as in Isaiah 61:1. The anointing with oil was to be a visible representation of an invisible and interior anointing of the Holy Spirit who would strengthen, inspire, and guide the king, priest, or prophet.

Prophecy and Typology in Revelation about the Messiah

Dei Verbum §2:

“This plan of revelation is realized by deeds and words having an inner unity: the deeds wrought by God in the history of salvation manifest and confirm the teaching and realities signified by the words, while the words proclaim the deeds and clarify the mystery contained in them.”

Prophecy and Typology in Revelation about the Messiah

St. Thomas Aquinas, *ST I*, q. 1, a. 10:

“Therefore that first signification whereby words signify things belongs to the first sense, the historical or literal. That signification whereby things signified by words have themselves also a signification is called the spiritual sense, which is based on the literal, and presupposes it.”

Prophecy and Typology in Revelation about the Messiah

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §117 distinguishes the literal and typological senses in the same way: “Thanks to the unity of God’s plan, not only the text of Scripture but also the realities and events about which it speaks can be signs.”

The literal sense is “the meaning conveyed by the words of Scripture and discovered by exegesis, following the rules of sound interpretation” (*CCC*, §116).

Prophecy and Typology in Revelation about the Messiah

The numerous messianic prophecies all prepare for the Messiah through words. However, God also prepared for the advent of the Messiah through the foundational events of Israel's history. These events were figures of a greater redemption to come and provided the context for the prophets to speak about and yearn for that greater redemption.

Prophecy and Typology in Revelation about the Messiah

The most important of these foundational events, of course, is the Exodus, and it furnishes the greatest material for the messianic expectation of a greater exodus to come. A second foundation is the figure of King David, who becomes the model of the messianic King.

Prophecy and Typology in Revelation about the Messiah

First, the prophet may describe the future expectation through a familiar figure or event, either past or contemporary with the prophecy. This familiar figure provides the contours for a future fulfillment that transcends the past or present event. Without the type, the future expectation would be harder to imagine or understand.

Prophecy and Typology in Revelation about the Messiah

A second way that typology functions within prophecy is when the future Messiah (or messianic event such as the return from exile) is described in such a way that the prophecy seems partially fulfilled in a future figure proximate to the prophet, as in the case of Solomon in 2 Samuel 7:14 and King Hezekiah in Isaiah 7:14.

Prophecy and Typology in Revelation about the Messiah

A third way that typology is present in messianic prophecies is through the fact that Christ's messianic work is accomplished not all in one act, but in two stages or *comings*, the second of which we still await. The time between the two comings is the time of the messianic Kingdom, the Church.

Prophecy and Typology in Revelation about the Messiah

Messianic prophecy thus can make use of four levels: (1) the **type** in the history of Israel (such as the Exodus or Davidic kingship), (2) a contemporary **partial** realization in the course of Israel's history (as, for example, King Hezekiah), (3) **full** realization in the Person of Christ in His **first** coming in humility, and (4) full realization in His Kingdom in His **second** coming in glory, as the Church militant passes into the Church triumphant.

Jewish Understanding of the Messianic Prophecies

Maimonides on the Messianic Prophecies

Faith in the coming of the Messiah is the twelfth of the thirteen foundational principles of faith articulated by Maimonides (1138-1204) and recited in the synagogue: “I believe with perfect faith in the coming of the Messiah, and though he tarry, yet I await his coming.”

- But although faith in the Messiah is foundational for Judaism, there are many different understandings of the Messiah, his mission, and the kingdom that he will usher in.

Jewish Understanding of the Messianic Prophecies

As Christian interpreters distinguish what belongs to each coming, in a similar way Jewish interpreters often distinguish those prophetic elements that refer to the Messiah and the messianic age, from those that refer properly to the world to come (*olam ha ba*) and the eschatological fulfillment of all God's promises.

Jewish Understanding of the Messianic Prophecies

Joseph Klausner:

“The Tannaim [rabbinic sages in the Mishnah] also like Judaism later and Christianity, always looked forward to a time when sin would vanish completely and the sacrifices, like all the rest of the requirements of the Law, would no longer be necessary. But that time without sin and without the Law is to come after the Messianic age. Only then ‘will the righteous sit with their crowns on their heads, basking in the brightness of the *Shekhinah*.’”

Maimonides on the Messianic Prophecies

1. Maimonides says that the Messianic age precedes the Resurrection and the world to come and does not yet involve a new heavens and earth.

Maimonides on the Messianic Prophecies

2. Maimonides says that the Messianic age involves a restoration of the Kingdom of David as it was formerly. From the Christian perspective this interpretation falls short.

Maimonides on the Messianic Prophecies

3. Maimonides states that the Messianic age will not involve a fundamental change in the Law of God and the offering of sacrifice, although other rabbinical authorities sometimes seem to disagree.

- But it would be reasonable therefore to expect that Israel's worship in the messianic age would commemorate the works of the Messiah in a new way.

Maimonides on the Messianic Prophecies

4. Maimonides held that the Messiah would rebuild the Temple and gather the exiles of Israel into one kingdom. The Jewish messianic expectation is thus tied to the coming of a *kingdom* in which God would rule through a restored Israel and a restored Temple.

- Christians also hold this but give it an ecclesiological and sacramental interpretation. Christ, present in the Eucharist, is the new Temple.

Maimonides on the Messianic Prophecies

5. Maimonides rightly points out that the Messianic prophecies contain allegories (or types) which are difficult to interpret, and which can only rightly be interpreted after the advent of the Messiah.

Multiple Messiahs?

Because of the difficulty of combining the political and the spiritual dimensions, and also because certain passages indicate that the Messiah would be slain and lamented over (Zech 12:10–13), the later rabbinical tradition often spoke of two Messiahs: one, a Messiah son of Joseph (that is, of the tribe of Ephraim) would be a warrior who would be slain in battle, and who would be followed by the Messiah son of David who would inaugurate the Messianic age and its glory.

Multiple Messiahs?

The Dead Sea Scrolls seem to show that the Qumran community expected two Messiahs, a priestly Messiah and a political or kingly Messiah, whom they referred to as the “Messiahs of Aaron and Israel.”

Multiple Messiahs?

Another problem from the Jewish perspective is the relation between the inauguration of the messianic age and the World to Come. What is the Messiah's role with regard to the resurrection of the dead and the destruction of death? The later Jewish rabbinical tradition generally associates the Messiah with the raising of the dead, but it is unclear how that is connected with his political and spiritual mission in this world.

Multiple Messiahs?

This question is resolved by Christ's resurrection. The Messiah who rises from the dead is the one in whom all will rise at His glorious return.

Messianic Prophecy as a Motive of Credibility

St. Justin Martyr: “For with what reason should we believe of a crucified man that He is the first-born of the unbegotten God, and Himself will pass judgment on the whole human race, unless we had found testimonies concerning Him published before He came and was born as man, and unless we saw that things had happened accordingly: . . . men of every race persuaded by His teaching through the apostles, and rejecting their old habits.

Messianic Prophecy as a Motive of Credibility

The Messiah will be universal king with an eternal throne (2 Sam 7:16); a man of sorrows (Isa 53); slain (Dan 9:26) and mourned over (Zech 12:10); and a new Moses and a priest “after the order of Melchizedek” (Ps 110:4). Thus many Jews at the time of Jesus expected two different kinds of messiahs. The fact that these are all realized in Jesus of Nazareth is an essential motive of credibility.

Messianic Prophecy as a Motive of Credibility

The Messiah is tied to the fundamental roles and great types in Israel: He will be a **new Adam** who crushes the head of Satan and restores man to beatitude (Gen 3:15); a **blessing for all nations** (Gen 12:3); a **prophet** like **Moses** who will fully reveal the Father (Deut 18); a **high priest** (Ps 110); a **victim** who atones for all human sin (Isa 53); and a **king** who will gather all the Gentiles into His kingdom and rule eternally over a universal kingdom (Dan 7 and Ps 72). All of these tasks can be accomplished fully only by one who is both true God and perfect man.

Joyful Mysteries: Prophecies of the Lineage and Mission of the Messiah

Genesis 3:15

God says to the serpent:

“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he [the seed of the woman] shall crush your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”

The “seed of the Woman” who will crush the head of the serpent is the first mention of the messianic promise.

Joyful Mysteries: Prophecies of the Lineage and Mission of the Messiah

Genesis 3:15

This text is often referred to as the *protoevangelium*, for it combines key aspects of the mystery of the Messiah. He is the offspring of the Woman, which refers to His birth. He crushes the head of the serpent, which signifies His redemptive triumph over sin and death. His heel is crushed in the process, which is a reference to His Passion. Christ crushes the head of Satan precisely by allowing Satan to mortally bruise His human nature.

Genesis 3:15

- Genesis 3:15 gives great importance to “the woman.” She is said to be in enmity with the serpent, and is seen as an associate of the savior, as Eve was an associate of Adam.
- She is the serpent’s punishment because she is to bring forth a Son who will triumph over the evil that consent to the serpent’s temptation inflicted on our first parents.

“In Your Seed All Nations Will Be Blessed”

Gen 12:1-3: “Now the

r kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will

“In Your Seed All Nations Will Be Blessed”

2. Gen 18:18: “The LORD said, ‘Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, seeing that Abraham shall become a great and mighty nation, and in him all the nations of the earth shall be blessed?’”

“In Your Seed All Nations Will Be Blessed”

3. Gen 22:16–18, after Abraham takes his son to be sacrificed: “By myself I have sworn, says the LORD, because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will indeed bless you, and I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore. And your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies, and by your descendants shall all the nations of the earth bless themselves, because you have obeyed my voice.”

4. To Isaac in Genesis 26:4–5.

“In Your Seed All Nations Will Be Blessed”

5. To Jacob in Genesis 28:13-14.

“I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your descendants; and your descendants shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed.”