

Theologies of the Messiah: Class One

Introduction, Divided Kingdom, and Exile

WHAT IS A MESSIAH? [OPEN WITH PSALM 137:1-6]

Messiah literally means “anointed one.” The word comes from the Hebrew “*mashiach*,” just as Christ comes from the Greek “*Christos*.” To be anointed was a ritual consecrating with oil poured on one’s head. Many were anointed, including: kings, priests, prophets, Cyrus the Persian King, and holy objects like the altar and vessels in the Temple. When a person was anointed, it was a way of showing that they were blessed by God for a chosen purpose or position and that God was with them.¹



1. "Samuel + David" on the Castra Center in Haifa, Israel by Eric Bower.

WHERE DOES THIS THEOLOGY COME FROM?

Usually, when we learn about the Messiah, it’s Advent or Easter time. We hear that Jesus wasn’t the Messiah that the Jews were expecting and continue from there. What we don’t usually think about is that this theology grew and evolved over hundreds of years. It had its roots in the earliest biblical texts (even Genesis!) and it was never only one thing. Each period imagined and re-imagined what the ideal king would look like or how the coming “prophet like Moses” would help make things better. As we go along it is important for us to remember that we’re not talking about one theology (or even one per time period), but multiple competing ideas that were in conversation with one another and that influenced one another.²

Further, though most people were aware of beliefs in a messiah or THE Messiah, that does not mean that everyone believed in a messiah. On top of that, some people believed in two, three, or four messiahs by Jesus’s day.³

THE DIVIDED KINGDOM & THE TIME OF EXILE

BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The United Kingdom began in about 1050 BC when Israel got a king and includes the reigns of Saul, David, and Solomon. David, in particular, was seen as an ideal king: leading in battle, uniting Israel, and serving God (except for some glaring sinful deeds). In 1 Samuel 13:14, Samuel describes David as, “a man after God’s own heart.”



2. "The Flight of the Prisoners," c.1896-1902 by James Tissot.

The kingdom divided when, in about 931 BC, Jeroboam led a revolt against Solomon's son Rehoboam, who was king. Jeroboam set up a kingdom in Samaria, often referred to as "Israel" or the northern kingdom. The southern kingdom was referred to as Judah.⁴ The next 300+ years was characterized by fighting between the north and the south and battles against nearby tribes and mighty empires. In 722, the northern kingdom fell to the Assyrian Empire and in 587, the southern kingdom fell to the Babylonian empire and was exiled to Babylon.

MESSIAH AS KING & MILITARY LEADER

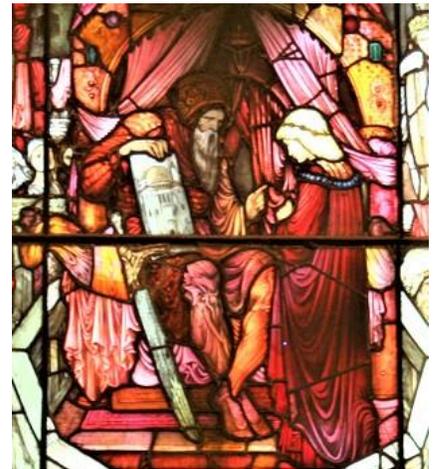
Since David, the anointed, was the ideal king, it made sense that early theologies about the messiah would be connected to the idea of kingship. We remember, too, that the king was not one who stayed in the palace and dictated to others. In Ancient Israel, he was expected to lead the army, to go out into battle himself. The earliest theologies of the messiah are not talking about a divine Son of God, but about having a good king once again like in the good old days: one who is faithful and one who is victorious in battle.

DAVIDIC KING IN THE PSALMS

A number of Psalms referred to this ideal king like Psalms 2, 18, 20, 21, 60, and 110. The people grew disappointed with the chaos and in-fighting of the Divided Kingdom. Once they were conquered and exiled, it was all the more common to look back on the glory days of David's reign. Psalms that were originally written with the purpose of celebrating David or looking for one of his descendants to come back to the throne, matched perfectly with the blossoming theologies of the messiah.⁵

Psalm 2:2-9

The kings of the earth set themselves,
and the rulers take counsel together,
against the LORD and God's anointed,
saying,



3. "David's Charge to Solomon" at Trinity Church, Boston. Designed by Edward Bune-Jones, executed by William Morris Studios 1882.

- ³“Let us burst their bonds asunder,
and cast their cords from us.”
- ⁴The One who sits in the heavens laughs;
the LORD has them in derision.
- ⁵Then God will speak to them in wrath,
and terrify them in fury, saying,
- ⁶“I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill.”
- ⁷I will tell of the decree of the LORD:
God said to me, “You are my son;
today I have begotten you.
- ⁸Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage,
and the ends of the earth your possession.
- ⁹You shall break them with a rod of iron,
and dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.”

Psalm 20:6-9

- ⁶Now I know that the LORD will help God’s anointed;
God will answer him from God’s holy heaven
with mighty victories by God’s right hand.
- ⁷Some take pride in chariots, and some in horses,
but our pride is in the name of the LORD our God.
- ⁸They will collapse and fall,
but we shall rise and stand upright.
- ⁹Give victory to the king, O LORD;
answer us when we call.

1. What stands out to you in these passages?
2. Think about the people living in this time period and how they would connect with these psalms. Where do you see fear? Where do you see hope?
3. What do you think of the idea of the messiah as a military leader?
4. Is it hard to think of the messiah as a human and not as human/divine as we see in Jesus?

DAVIDIC KING IN THE PROPHETS



4. "King David Between Wisdom and Prophecy," a manuscript illustration of Psalm 27 from 10th century France.

King Josiah reigned in Judah in the late-7th century. After a lot of faithless kings and general faithlessness, Josiah was a reformer – maybe he was the righteous king! In his day, people had hoped that he was the one to fulfill these prophecies. But, as empires raged and he was killed in battle, the hope for a Davidic king transformed into a future anointed one.⁶ They still weren't thinking of the Messiah as a figure of the end times and Son of God, but they were looking further forward for a righteous king. The prophet Micah was active in the southern kingdom from around 737 to 696 BC – during the time the northern kingdom fell.⁷

Micah 5:2-5a

- ² But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah,
 who are one of the little clans of Judah,
 from you shall come forth for me
 one who is to rule in Israel,
 whose origin is from of old,
 from ancient days.
- ³ Therefore he shall give them up until the time
 when she who is in labor has brought forth;
 then the rest of his kindred shall return
 to the people of Israel.
- ⁴ And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the LORD,
 in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God.
 And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great
 to the ends of the earth;
- ⁵ and he shall be the one of peace.

Ezekiel 37:21b-28

Thus says the Lord GOD: I will take the people of Israel from the nations among which they have gone, and will gather them from every quarter, and bring them to their own land. ²²I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king

shall be king over them all. Never again shall they be two nations, and never again shall they be divided into two kingdoms. ²³They shall never again defile themselves with their idols and their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions. I will save them from all the apostasies into which they have fallen, and will cleanse them. Then they shall be my people, and I will be their God.

²⁴My servant David shall be king over them; and they shall all have one shepherd. They shall follow my ordinances and be careful to observe my statutes. ²⁵They shall live in the land that I gave to my servant Jacob, in which your ancestors lived; they and their children and their children's children shall live there forever; and my servant David shall be their prince forever. ²⁶I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; and I will bless them and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary among them forevermore. ²⁷My dwelling place shall be with them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ²⁸Then the nations shall know that I the LORD sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary is among them forevermore.

1. What stands out to you in these passages?
2. Think about the people living in this time period and how they would connect with these prophets: Micah when the northern kingdom fell and Ezekiel in the 6th century (he was in captivity and exiled with his people). Where do you see fear? Where do you see hope?
3. The word "messiah" doesn't appear in either of these scriptures.⁸ What are the clues that point us to messiah in these passages?
4. In the Psalms, Micah passage, and many others, the messiah is associated with victory in war, but that isn't found in Ezekiel's prophecy.⁹ Why do you think that is?

WHAT DOES THE MESSIAH DO?

In this time period:¹⁰

- Gather the exiles and refugees home to Israel
- Be a new king in the line (and heart) of David
- Work to restore (or rebuild) the Temple
- Fight wars for God in a kingdom that is the equal of others around it
- Bring spiritual renewal and peace to the people
- Show the other nations that God is God

¹ "Messiah." Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Messiah> (accessed 12/3/2019). See also Lending, Jona. "Messianism, Roots 1: Anointment" Livius.org. <https://www.livius.org/articles/religion/messiah/messiah-roots-1-annointment/> (accessed 12/3/2019); See also Paladino, Gian Nicola. "Messianic Expectations in the Second Temple Period Applied to Jesus of Nazareth." Academia.edu. https://www.academia.edu/37829437/Messianic_Expectations_in_the_Second_Temple_Period_applied_to_Jesus_of_Nazareth (accessed 12/3/2019), pp 1, 7.

² Paladino, 2.

³ "Second Temple Judaism." Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Temple_Judaism#Messianism_and_the_end_times (accessed 12/3/2019).

⁴ "Jeroboam's Revolt." Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jeroboam%27s_Revolt (accessed 12/3/2019).

⁵ Lending, Jona, "Messiah, Roots 2: Psalms." Livius.org. <https://www.livius.org/articles/religion/messiah/messiah-roots-2-psalms/> (accessed 12/3/2019).

⁶ "Lending, Jona, "Messiah, Roots 4: Josiah and Cyrus." Livius.org. <https://www.livius.org/articles/religion/messiah/messiah-roots-4-josiah-and-cyrus/> (accessed 12/3/2019).

⁷ "Micah (prophet)." Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Micah_\(prophet\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Micah_(prophet)) (accessed 12/3/2019).

⁸ Lending, "Roots 3" & Lending "Roots 4."

⁹ Lending "Roots 4."

¹⁰ "Messiah," Wikipedia. See also "Judaism's Views of Jesus." Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judaism%27s_view_of_Jesus (Accessed 12/3/2019).