

THE MESSIAH IN THE OLD TESTAMENT IN THE LIGHT OF RABBINICAL WRITINGS

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To the English reader

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LITERATURE CONSULTED

INTRODUCTION

One of the most famous books of our century is Alex Haley's *ROOTS*. It has been translated into many languages and even made into a film. In the book a black American searches for his origins, finishing up in a remote village on the African continent. Such genealogical research can help us both to understand our own disposition and heritage, and to appreciate the achievements of previous generations; it can even help towards understanding ourselves.

The Christian church ought also to study its own roots, manifest in the Old and New Testaments. Both of these, however, have their origins in distant lands with topography and language quite foreign to us today.

The basic message of the Bible is perfectly clear. It tells us itself to "seek out the book of the LORD, and read!"

"This is what the LORD says: Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls."¹

The way found by previous generations to be good tends to be forgotten. The Arabs say that, "The road is wiser than the man". The fundamentals of the Christian faith have often been violently assaulted. The simple message of the Bible is sufficient as it stands, without necessarily requiring all the expositors it has. But precisely this fact, that we have become increasingly alienated from the roots of our faith, gives us good reason to embark on our own spiritual genealogical search.

Although the Bible as it stands speaks of life's simple realities, some of its truths can be seen only with the eyes of faith. In speaking of these the New Testament uses the Greek word *mysterion*, 'mystery' -- the 'mystery of the kingdom of heaven', 'the mystery of the gospel', 'the mystery of God', and even 'the mystery of faith'. The most frequently mentioned of these is 'the mystery of Christ'. This Messiah-mystery is closely bound up with the Old Testament prophecies, of whose nature and background we are often ignorant. There, if anywhere, we find the words of Peter relevant, when he says that,

"No prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation... but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit".²

Just like the writer Alex Haley, in attempting to explore the mystery of Christ we will be obliged to cross the wide ocean of history and to travel far back in time. It will be necessary for us to handle ancient documents whose concepts, mode of presentation, and thought patterns are different from our own. These earliest roots of our faith reach back to Jesus' own time, however, and they exemplify a way of interpretation obtained at the time the Christian faith was born. It is this challenge that we face, together.

This ROOTS study is based upon two books of mine, originally written in Hebrew, "Christ in the Old Testament" and "Christ in the New Testament -- In the light of the Rabbinic Literature". They are the result of a special interest of over 35 years, born amidst practical work while in contact with Jewish scholars. This being so, one can rest assured that they will not contain mere armchair theology. In addition to the specialised Hebrew sources, approximately 300 works -- according to my files -- in various languages, concerned solely with the Messianic idea, have left their mark on the creation of the background.

In my original Hebrew book on the Old Testament I refer to the traditional Jewish account of Nahshon, according to which a man of that name was the first to jump into the Red Sea when the Israelites crossed over at Moses' command -- followed then by the rest. This *ROOTS* study is a similar kind of leap of faith into an area which is both very broad and, in actual fact, comparatively unknown. At the same time, I know

THE MESSIAH IN SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

The concept of the Messiah has been both a unifying and a dividing factor between Christianity and Judaism. Christians speak about it as a question of the fulfilment of prophecy, whereas the Jews try to nullify the Church's Messianic interpretation. This being so, we should try at least to listen to each other, to discuss the common roots of our respective traditions. Indeed such discussions have already taken place.

In October 1976 representatives of the evangelical churches and of the synagogues met in Berlin for a joint discussion, in which they issued an official public statement. This encouraged Christians to make the fundamentals of their faith known to Jews, and vice versa. It was felt that this kind of dialogue could promote mutual understanding. In discussing these things we are not, however, talking in a vacuum: behind us is a history of almost two thousand years of controversy. The schism between the mother and daughter religions created a conflict of tragic proportions, which is still going on. Nevertheless, a comparison of Jewish and Christian origins will show both parties the way to a better understanding of the roots of their respective faiths.

The 'Theology of Fulfilment' controversy

The Christian church has traditionally considered Christ to be the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies. One result of the religious debate of our day, however, is that some Christian theologians, those who represent the very liberal position, have called this kind of interpretation into question, in part because thus one of the major obstacles to Jewish/Christian dialogue can be removed.

In the autumn of 1981 a Dr. John Pawlikowski from Chicago was in Israel and gave a lecture against this "theology of fulfilment" to a Jewish audience, offering in its place the idea of a continually unfolding revelation. Jesus' Messiahship, he maintained, was based primarily upon his own awareness of his call.

In my remote homeland Finland a typical article in a clerical magazine stated that this "Bible-issue is a festering sore in the mother church's heart". The writer saw the problem as being specifically the Messianic prophecies,

"which play a central role in the New Testament, because the writers of the NT read the Old Testament as a book which made constant reference to the salvation experienced in Christ. You do not need to be much of an exegete, however, to see that *such bridges from one testament to another are without exception artificial, nor do they convince those who think rationally.*"⁸

In the same way he declares that, "the Virgin Birth, for example, and the Doctrine of the Trinity have been put in a questionable light as a result of critical Bible studies". These and similar thoughts have been echoed in many theological treatises. They maintain that these matters "have been cleared up in the last two hundred years", and that they are "the common property of permanent and internationally generally approved research", One of these scholars crystallises his argument by saying that: "No OT student claims, neither could he with any basis claim, that Isaiah chapters 9 and 53 and Psalm 22 speak of Jesus". "The Jews," he generalises, "do not accept Jesus as the Messiah. They see in the Suffering Servant of the Lord primarily the nation of Israel."⁹ Similar statements have been made in the ongoing international discussion. But is it also true?

Of course no-one can demand that Jesus' *name* should appear in the OT prophecies before they can be applied to him. We understand perfectly well what Jesus meant when he claimed that Moses spoke of him.

Even after the resurrection he is said to have spoken about Moses and all the prophets, "explaining what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself". Jesus functioned in a way that was understood by his contemporaries, *and all Jewish exegesis from Jesus' time to the Middle Ages, even up to the present day, is founded on the same method*. Precisely because of this fact that the fundamentals of 'fulfilment theology' are beginning to fade, we will try in what follows to speak of the roots of our faith.

Judaism's traditional stance

The concept of the Messiah has been entirely neglected in Judaism, left with hardly the status of a step-child. Making the rounds of the Jewish libraries only rarely will a slim volume on Messianic Expectation turn up amidst the vast literature on the *Torah*, the Jewish law. The *Halakha*¹⁰ interpretation has completely taken over the position of guardian of the Jew's religious life, and the *Torah* has become a substitute for the Biblical idea of Salvation. Franz Delitzsch, in his day perhaps the most profound expert on Judaism, stated that the Jews no longer believed in the Messiah. Rather they have the general expectation that liberation for them will be effected without a Messiah figure. Along with this "nationalistic narrowing down" Judaism has also lost its universal character.¹¹ Jewish scholars have, on the whole, written on the Messiah concept only in their apologetic works. Foremost among these are Rabbi David Qimhi's "*Book of the Covenant, the Polemics of RaDaQ*"¹² with the Christians" from the end of the 12th century, and the "*Strengthening of Faith*" by the 16th century Rabbi Isaac Ben Abraham Troki of the 'Karaim' sect.¹³

Jewish Messianic belief is epitomised in the works of the Mediaeval scholar Moses Maimonides (RaMBaM - Rabbi Moses Ben Maimon), of whom it was said "From Moses to Moses no-one has risen like Moses". In his book "*Ordinances of the Kings*" he compresses all that he has to say about the Messiah into six pages: The Messiah-King will be first and foremost a teacher of the *Torah*; he will reinstate the strict punishments of the Law of Moses and draw up his own laws, which the people will then be compelled to observe; first he will initiate the *milhemet mitsvah*, the war of ordinances, and only then the overthrow of the dominating powers, and he will also build the Temple.

When he mentions Jesus RaMBaM speaks respectfully, using the full form of his name *Yêshûa*, 'saviour'.¹⁴ According to the Mediaeval slanderous treatise *Toldôth Yeshu*, the letters of the shorter, most widely used version of the name, *Yeshu*, were an abbreviation for "May his name and all memory of him be blotted out". RaMBaM states in his pamphlet that "Jesus the Nazarene, who appeared to be the Messiah, was put to death on the orders of the Great Synagogue", and that "the teachings of Jesus the Nazarene and that Ishmaelite [Mohammed] who came after him attempted to make straight the way for the Messiah-King and to restore the whole world so that together it would serve God". This favourable reference brings to mind the word used by Josef Klausner in his book "*Jesus of Nazareth*". For him Jesus was like a trailblazer of the Kingdom of God.¹⁵

James Parkes states in his book "*The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue*" that,

"Before the destruction of Jerusalem, the first Christians fled to the East bank of the Jordan and the Pharisees to Jamnia - that is why in the absence of the Temple the Jewish people had only the *Torah* as the foundation of their spiritual existence."¹⁶

The ultimate disillusionment for them was when Rabbi Aqiba proclaimed Simon Bar-Kokhba as the Messiah. The subsequent military disaster estranged them completely from Messianic thinking and resulted in a simplified halakha Judaism in which the Hebrew statutes became axiomatic. We will see, however, that the Synagogue's earliest sources still spoke a great deal about the Messiah, referring to an even wider corpus of data than the Christian Church.

It was really only at the end of the last century that interest in the Messiah began to grow. From then on the subject has been studied by, to mention a few Jewish writers, Leo Baeck, C.G.Montefiore, Martin Buber,

Gershom Scholem, Josef Klausner, David Flusser, Schalom Ben-Chorin, and others less well-known.¹⁷ The former prejudices have abated to the extent that New Testament lectures are now given in Jerusalem's Hebrew University, and selected extracts are even taught in the schools.

Christian study of Jewish sources

In the first few decades of this century in Christian circles there was a flurry of interest in the Rabbinic literature. This gave birth to many outstanding works illuminating the Jewish background of the Messianic concept, the most famous of which are the works of Hugo Gressmann, Moritz Zobel, S.Mowinckel, Eugen Hühn, and L.Dürr. These and corresponding studies, which laid the foundation for Joseph Klausner's books, attempt to explain the Messianic Expectation historicocritically, and its explicitly religious nature is neglected.¹⁸

The specially Judaic character of the Messianic concept was perhaps most deeply understood in the 19th century by Alfred Edersheim and E.W.Hengstenberg, and in our own time by, for example, Gösta Lindeskog. The general presentation of the Messianic prophecies by the renowned Franz Delitzsch, who was mentioned above, is also without peer.¹⁹ We might say that a century ago Christian theologians took the Rabbinic sources more seriously than they do in our own time.

Worth mentioning of those Christian apologists whose aim was the defence of their faith and who used the Rabbinic literature are Alexander McCaul, A.Lukyn Williams, and Bernhard Pick. Dr McCaul compared the doctrines of the Talmud and the New Testament. His books have appeared in English, German, and even in the RaSHI Hebrew script.²⁰ A.Lukyn Williams replied to Troki's disputed "*Strengthening of the Faith*", in a work which was given a preface by Strack.²¹

It is worthwhile acquainting oneself with the extensive work which learned men have done towards clarifying the roots of the Messianic concept. Historicocritical research tries to undermine the Bible's specific Messianic character because a similar expectation of salvation is found amongst other peoples; Jewish writers, as a result of their own historical disillusionment tend to deny a personal Messiah -- and the greater part of today's scholars is inclined to narrow down the Messianic Hope to what in their opinion are the precious few biblical prophecies upon which it can be based.

OUR COMMON HERITAGE

We often forget that both the devoted Jews and Christians do have a common exegetical startingpoint for Biblical studies. In the Daily Prayers, so-called "Sidûr" in Hebrew, there is a long section of beautiful morning prayers. It includes "Thirteen principles of the faith", which are to be repeated in every day. There we read as follows:

clause 6: "I believe with perfect faith that *all the words of the prophets are true.*"

clause 7: "I believe with perfect faith that *the prophecy of Moses our teacher, peace be unto him, was true, and that he was the chief of the prophets, both of those that preceded and of those that followed him.*"

clause 12: "*I believe with perfect faith in the coming of the Messiah, and, though he tarry, I will wait daily for his coming.*"

clause 13: I believe with perfect faith that *there will be a resurrection of the dead at the time when it shall please the Creator, blessed be his name...*²²

Every member of the Jewish community is bound to accept these words composed by famous Moses Maimonides RaMBaM (1135-1204). They resemble the words in Luke 24:44 and Acts 28:33 according to which the Christians approach was based on the prophecies found "in the law of Moses, the Prophets and

the Psalms". This Messianic interpretation" is not "an artificial bridge". All this raises the question what other sources ought to be used in order to shed light on the roots of our Christology.

From the scientific point of view it should be possible to approve as justifying a Messianic interpretation those OT passages into which the Jewish prescriptive and generally approved OT commentaries have read the Messianic concept, and those interpretations which the NT has understood as being Messianic. The older the tradition of interpretation, the greater the relative weight which can be assigned to the source as an original exponent of the Messianic concept.

It must of course be borne in mind that the NT speaks of the "mystery of Christ".²³ Connected with this Messianic mystery are historical and "cosmic", temporal and spiritual features which ought not to be watered down. This becomes apparent from the old Jewish sources in particular.

It may be that it is not possible to study spiritual phenomena or those of the history of ideas by a purely historicocritical approach. It is said that when the apple fell on Isaac Newton's head he discovered the Law of Gravity. If we cut this apple into pieces we would not find the law in the apple -- neither would a surgeon have been likely to find it in Newton's head: it was somewhere in between the apple and the head. Spiritual phenomena cannot be dissected, they must be internalised. This also applies to the Messianic mystery.

If we study the Bible and the Rabbinic literature carefully, we cannot fail to be surprised at the abundance of Messianic interpretation in the earliest works known to us. An old Hebrew saying goes, *"I did not seek, and so I did not find -- then I sought, and I found!"* and another, *"When we reveal the palm of our hand, another two palms are still hidden"* -- in other words, when we look into an issue, behind it there are two new challenges which we could not have seen without looking at the first. And the Talmud states unequivocally: *"All the prophets prophesied only for the days of the Messiah."*²⁴

[8.](#) Dr. Timo Veijola in *"Pappisliiton Jäsenlehti"*

[9.](#) Prof. Risto Lauha

[10.](#) the word *Halakha* means "decision", "norm", "systematized" legal precept. It is a Rabbinic word derived from *halakh*, to walk. It is part of the *Mishna*, the interpretation of the law.

[11.](#) Franz Delitzsch, *"Messianische Weissagungen in geschichtlicher Folge"*, Leipzig 1890, p 11,102.

[12.](#) In the Rabbinic literature the Sages' names are written in these abbreviated forms, ie Rabbi David Qimhi.

[13.](#) The Karaim sect, which official Judaism does not accept, bases its exegesis solely on the OT and not on the Jewish tradition. The books mentioned are in Hebrew.

[14.](#) RaMBaM, *Hilchot Melachim*, 11:4.

[15.](#) J.Klausner, *"Jesus von Nazareth"*, Jerusalem 1952, p574

[16.](#) p77.

[17.](#) cf Bibl.

[18.](#) cf Bibl.

[19.](#) cf Bibl. for main works.

[20.](#) RaSHI script.

[21.](#) cf Bibl.

[22.](#) *Daily Prayers*, A New Edition revised by Dr. M. Stern, New York 1928.

[23.](#) eg. Eph.3:4, and Col.2:2

[24.](#) *Berakoth* 34b.

CHOOSING THE APPROPRIATE METHOD OF STUDY

What is the right way to delineate the Messianic mystery? How can we find 'the very voice', the *ipsissima vox*, which will expound the Bible in the spirit of the Bible? Formally, we expect true scholarship to observe pre-determined methods. It is true that many of the so-called 'Messianic prophecies' to which the NT refers

can be interpreted in the context of the early stages of Israel's history, and scientifically speaking, this historical background is the only legitimate and correct interpretation model which has any bearing on the issue. Nevertheless, the NT writers understood the texts "prophetically" and gave them a Christological interpretation. This means that they did not proceed "historicocritically" or strictly scientifically, in the way that modern theologians wish they would: for today's critics such ways of interpretation are artificial. We must therefore ask ourselves, Does the NT's "suprahistorical" approach reflect the central characteristics of the Messianic interpretation as it appeared in ancient times? And if so, the modern critic must find methods which will bring out, just as was manifestly obvious at the time of its origin, the full import and internal consistency of the subject he is studying. If no success has as yet been met with here, there is good reason to seek a method which will be more suited to the subject matter.

We could define the difference between homiletics and theological research as being that theology strives to explain what each word of the Bible meant at the time it was written down, and homiletics primarily what the man of today can get out of it. It could be said that historicocritical studies have been unable or reluctant to understand the NT's Christology and its grounds. That is why it is necessary to find tools with which to dig more deeply into the roots of the Messianic idea.

We are hardly likely to turn up a Philosopher's Stone which would solve all these problems, but there are three factors which will help us to get near to the heart of our problem.

1. We need to determine *what modes of thinking and presentation held sway between the Old and New Testaments*, the crucible in which Christianity was formed.
2. In the same way the problem ought to be solved as to *how a discipline outside of the 'hard sciences' can find the internal integrity of its subject without doing violence to the real intentions of the people under study*.
3. Furthermore, in choosing a method of study we must always determine *which sources are most capable of shedding light on the ways of thinking current in the era in question*.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BIBLICAL AND WESTERN WAYS OF THINKING

The well-known Jewish writer Schalom Ben-Chorin characterises in one of his books the essential differences between Greek learning and Biblical thought.¹ The Greek world strove to find orderly rules, a method which obtained from Aristotle to Hegel: details were then fitted into larger wholes and forced into preformed structures. *Hebrew thought, on the other hand, proceeds from details to rules, from concrete observations to ideals. Thus the Bible knows neither dogma nor system as such.* Rather, it exhibits two typical basic aims: narrative, and a law intended as a guide to life. The Pentateuch, Psalms, and Prophets relate over and over again the great works of God. Thus historical facts are preserved unchanged, even though their interpretation receives a new colouring according to the requirements of each respective age. Neither does the sacred law as revealed in the commandments change with the changing fashions. In place of the Greek love of system the Bible exemplifies associative thinking, in which every detail is immediately related to the whole and all the parts are interdependent.

This same associative principle is found throughout the Rabbinic literature right down to our own time. Recently the NT too has, in both Jewish and Christian circles, been studied as a kind of *Midrash*, as a creation similar to the preaching-exegesis of the synagogue, observing the laws of Jewish Biblical interpretation. Fundamental to this approach is the axiom that every detail of the revelation of God, the *Torah*, is to be expounded and must be explained both in relation to the subject under discussion and as an independent entity, because the word of God never loses its 'literal sense'. Furthermore, every argument is to be backed up with a word of Scripture because the opinions of men are in themselves of no value.

The Midrash often repeats the Aramaic saying, *Hâ bê-hâ talî*, "This depends on this", forming internal bridges within the Bible's own message. Time and time again we are told that such and such a Sage has said in this or that other Sage's name, "as it is written, *va-gomer...*" ('and so forth...'). Then no more than the first few words of the Bible quote are given, the reader, knowing the Scriptures off by heart, recites the remainder silently to himself. This kind of OT use gives a certain "comprehensivity" to the whole presentation and prevents philosophising of an over-subjective kind.

Even a short *Midrash* may contain hundreds of OT quotes and the names of hundreds of Rabbis. In this way the whole presentation is anchored in history and in the tradition of the synagogue. We can see the same principle in operation in the NT which, according to Nestle's Greek register, contains 993 separate OT references.

In addition to the 'associative principle' the Old Synagogue used various expressions which, outside of its own literature, appear only in the NT. The so-called middôth or "measures" -- the ways of interpretation, of which there are 7,13,32 or even 70 -- help in checking the text's internal connections, taking into consideration the 'literal sense', Peshat; the 'hint' or 'quotes', Remez; the 'homiletics' or 'spiritual message', Drashah; and the 'mystery' Sôd. These four Hebrew words form the mnemonic PaRDeS or 'paradise', to which the Bible is often compared.

In the teaching of both Jesus and Paul we find here and there certain stylistic devices such as *al tiqrâ*, 'read not thus, but thus'; *tartei mashma*, 'the word has another meaning'; *muqdam umeuhar*, 'noting the earlier and later'; the change of word roots, and various forms of expression which the Midrash literature exemplifies.² They all spring from Jewish thought patterns.

No serious NT or OT study can be developed in ignorance of the special character of Hebrew thought and the soil from which the NT and OT originated.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE CHARACTERS OF THE NATURAL SCIENCES AND THE HUMANITIES

The research methods of the natural sciences and the humanities are considered to be fundamentally different from each other. The study of religion, ethics, and eg. aesthetics often have to content themselves with narrative and hermeneutic interpretation. The study of Method distinguishes between the *nomothetic* or the search for general laws (Greek *nomos*) and *idiographic*, that is, disciplines concerned with individual ideas and facts.³

Aristotle created the *topika* (from *topos* 'place') according to which in rhetoric and in the study of juridic problems *philosophers attempted to find the leading motifs* -- later it was developed by eg. Giovanni Batista Vico, who is considered to be the founder of the history of Philosophy.⁴ For this reason the humanities ought to survey the whole field of human thinking and put *the main aspects in their place*. Only from a wider "topical" -- I might almost say "topographical" -- base for comparison can the significance of the whole picture be envisaged. *Theology is one of these "idiographic" disciplines which must be studied in the light of their own special laws. If this theological "autonomy" is overlooked, the whole object of the studies will be violated.*

So that we might understand just how fundamental an issue is in question, it is worth looking at how Ye .hezkel Koifman assesses the state of today's Theology.⁵ In his four volume work "The Religious History of Israel from ancient times to the end of the Second Temple", he describes how Israel had its own personally stamped spiritual revelation, which does not lend itself to analysis by the usual historical criticism. It is not possible, for example, to think of Israel's religion as developing from the Canaanite cult which Israel

destroyed, because in those areas where the cult was allowed to remain, no corresponding religion of revelation developed. Professor Koifman stresses that,

"Biblical studies in our day are faced with a rather strange situation: it is bound by the 'dominant method', although no-one knows exactly why this method 'dominates' research. It sometimes happens in the Humanities that some thesis or tenet which was originally founded on definite, generally accepted axioms maintains an artificial existence even after those axioms have been discredited. In our time this has also happened to Biblical studies... " The critical proofs of Wellhausen and other liberals faded out long ago... " "In the interim those axioms have one after another been retracted and broken down... and the protagonists of that school have been forced to admit that, for the most part their proofs can no longer stand up to criticism. But still they will not retract their conclusions, especially not those regarding literary criticism."

Professor Kaufmann maintains that, "historical truth is crystallised in the Bible message to a much greater extent than the Wellhausen school reckoned." Regarding the Pentateuch he says that,

"Today it can be shown that even if it were arranged and compiled after the time of Moses its source material is very old, not only in part or in its general tenor, but in its entirety, in its content, language, and even in its very letters."

For this reason the researcher ought to extend his critical attitude to critical studies as well.

METHOD, AND THE CHOICE OF THE APPROPRIATE SOURCE MATERIAL

Jewish tradition contains many tales of the Wise Youngsters of Jerusalem. Once someone asked one of them the way to a certain village. He answered, "Do you want the short long road or the long short one?" A shortcut may have obstacles which require a great deal of time to get over or round. And so a road which at first glance looks long may turn out to be the shortest. In this way the preceding introduction with information regarding the method has served as the key to what follows.

In our attempt to find the roots of our Christian faith it will be important while dealing with the OT and NT to select sources which will delineate as early as possible an understanding of the Bible and the way of thinking of the people we will be studying. The choice of an appropriate source material is always a part of research.

Even though the Messianic concept in Judaism today has come in for some rather roughhanded treatment, at the beginning of our era it was still of central significance. The main work of Judaic legislation, the *Talmud*, compiled over a period of three centuries from around the year 200, comprising 60 separate treatises in 13 thick volumes, states simply that, "*All the prophets prophesied not but of the days of the Messiah.*" "*The world was not created but only for the Messiah*"⁶ These statements lay the foundation for the entire discussion between Judaism and Christianity.

In the years of its formation the Talmud underwent its own internal censorship. Its scholars consciously avoided speaking about the Christian faith and certain Messianic prophecies, which were considered sensitive issues. In addition to this the Catholic church in the Middle Ages pressurised Jews into removing from the Talmud certain portions which were from a Christian point of view considered offensive -- they were actually preserved in a separate pamphlet which I also have. *This "great silence", as the scholars sometimes characterize it, and the "double censorship" have resulted that the Christian Church has seldom received any help from Jews in getting to know its own roots.*

In the main body of the book we will discuss the date and significance of the various source texts. Even at this stage, however, it is worth noting two primary sources -- the Midrash and the *Targum* -- which have not suffered the similar strict censorship which befell the Talmud.

The MIDRASH or "exposition", the synagogue's 'homiletic literature', which follows a certain, often strictly defined, form, dates in its six oldest Midrash sections from the second century AD, although they received their final written form in the 5th or 6th century. The censorship peculiar to the synagogue cannot be seen in them, and their tradition can often be traced back to before the time of Christ. In addition, there are another thirty or so later Midrash works which also here and there shed some light on the Messianic concept.⁷

The TARGUMS are explanatory versions of the OT in Aramaic. As they stand they also give support to the Jewish expositors of the Torah. The *Talmud states that, "The whole Torah in its entirety is in Hebrew, but certain things from the Targum also belong to it."*⁸ Only the *Targum of Onqelos* received the synagogue's official approval. It contains expository material on the whole Pentateuch and dates from the 2nd century AD. The Targums which go under the name of *Jonathan Ben Uzziel* were written later on the basis of a tradition which was handed down from one generation to another, although Jonathan himself lived very near to Jesus' time. The Targum of Jonathan contains also material which, according to some, dates from as far back as the 2nd century BC.

Just as in the Midrash literature the hand of the censor is not obvious in the Targums. This is further illustrated by the fact that, according to counts made, 72 OT passages are explained in the Targums as applying to the Messiah.

More than the other Targums, the tradition associated with the name of Jonathan highlights the Messianic concept, and for this reason we will describe him in the light of the Talmud.

Jonathan was the greatest pupil of the elder Hillel before the destruction of the Temple. One traditional account relates that Hillel had 80 pupils:

"40 of them earned the descent of the Holy Spirit upon them, just as Moses did. 30 that the sun would stand still above them, as in the time of Joshua the son of Nun; 20 were average; but the greatest of them was Jonathan Ben Uzziel, and the least Johanan Ben Zakkai. ... and let it be remembered that the latter was the creator of the renaissance of the Torah in Jamnia immediately after the destruction of the Temple."⁹

Jonathan translated the prophets into Aramaic, accompanied with brief explanations. His work of course aroused opposition from the scholars of the time, as they felt that the Hebrew original would thus be forgotten. But, in his own words, Jonathan went ahead so that doctrinal disputes would not multiply in Israel. It is remarkable that the synagogue accepted Onqelos' work even though he was a ger or proselyte. Jonathan's specifically Messianic emphasis was one of the reasons that his translation was not accepted.

Early Messianic expectation among the Jews is also brought out by the literature known as *Zohar* (brilliance, brightness), which is usually associated with the name of the 2nd century Shimeon Ben Johai. This esoteric Aramaic work, thousands of pages long, based on the Pentateuch and dealing with the being of God, achieved general approval alongside the Talmud in the academies of both East and West. Although it was put into a written form only in the 8th and 9th centuries it reflects a very early tradition. It contains, for example, delineations of the Suffering Messiah, of the Trinity, and of the Messiah as the Son of God, the origins of which are difficult to trace. The *Zohar* can also be regarded as belonging to the Jewish 'normative' sources.

As far as our source material is concerned it makes sense also to refer to Mediaeval Jewish Bible exposition, since certain Rabbis, such as the most famous exegete of Judaism RaSHI (Shalomon Jarchi, d.1105), often leaned on the Midrashim and the Targumim for support. In the same way, the Dead Sea Scrolls and the ancient Jewish 'Wisdom' literature may give some incidental support when discussing our material.

Nowadays more and more emphasis is being laid on the fact that in both OT and NT studies these sources are indispensable. This is confirmed by recent scholars such as John Bowker, S.H. Levey, David Daube and W.D. Davies as well as the older H.L. Strack and B. Pick.¹⁰

We will find as we search for the roots of the Christian faith that we have landed on a strange, unfamiliar continent. We are nevertheless on the right track. If someone wishes to familiarise himself with Chinese thought he would do well to take a trip to the Far East. Sometimes it almost requires the skills of an undercover agent to get to the heart of the problem. However, along the way many exciting and utterly captivating observations will be made, which can only serve to strengthen the grounds of our faith.

One of the best examples illustrating the search for one's own roots is on my bookshelf. I once had the opportunity in Israel of buying, from a certain Jewish Christian's estate, a book published in Helmstadt in 1609. The author, a Jewish scholar by name of Christianum Gerson, relates how he bought for eight schillings, from an old poverty-stricken Christian woman, the New Testament in Luther's translation. With his two brothers-in-law he began to study it to find out how this "grave mistake" could possibly have conquered hundreds of thousands of hearts. The Gospel message shook him so much that he had to go on reading it alone, in secret. He compared its message with that of the OT and his own Jewish sources, and so, according to his preface, through this "written word" he came to a personal faith in Jesus.

At first his family and friends rejected him. In describing this he borrows the words of Psalm 27:10, "Though my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will receive me." Soon, however, his wife and children followed in their father's footsteps. In order to prove to his friends the grounds of his decision he wrote this 700 page treatise on the Christian faith, in which he compares the teaching of the NT and of the Talmud with each other. Although Gerson compares the roots of Christianity primarily with the OT, the hundreds of quotations from the Talmud and the dozens of references to the Midrash give the feeling of being at the roots of the Christian faith."

Luther said in his time that, "Christus universae scripturae scopus est", which freely translated runs, "Christ is the true perspective of all the scriptures".¹¹ The whole of this "Roots" book is founded on that basis.

^{1.} Schalom Ben-Chorin, *Jüdischer Glaube*, pp 17-21.

^{2.} See eg. M. Gertner, *Midrashim in the New Testament*, Addison G. Wright, *The Literature Genre Midrash*; and I.L. Seeligmann, *Voraussetzungen der Midraschexegese*; cf. *Bibl.*

^{3.} See eg. Wilhelm Dilthey, *Der Aufbau der geschichtlichen Welt in den Geisteswissenschaften*. Ges. Werke, Band 7.

^{4.} Lothar Bornscheuer, *Topik, Zur Struktur der gesellschaftlichen Einbildungskraft*, Frankfurt am Main 1976 pp 26-7.

^{5.} We will quote the name in Hebrew way and follow the characterization of the introduction to his Hebrew work.

^{6.} *Berakoth 34,b, San. 99a, San 98b.*

^{7.} See *Encyclopaedia JUDAICA*. vol 11

^{8.} Masechet Sopherim 1.

^{9.} P. 518 in the Hebrew reference work of Mordechai Margalioth on the "Wise" of the Talmud

^{10.} John Bowker, *The Targums & Rabbinic Literature. An Introduction to Jewish Interpretation of Scripture*. Cambridge 1969;

S.H. Levey, *The Messiah, An Aramaic Interpretation. The Messianic Exegesis of the Targum*. Cincinnati 1974; H.L. Strack, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 1st ed. Berlin 1887; B. Pick, *Old Testament Passages Messianically Applied by the Ancient Synagogue*, Hebraica 1885-88

^{11.} Christianum Gerson, *Der Juden Thalmud*, Fürnembster Inhalt und Widerlegung, zum andermal gedruckt in Helmstadt 1609, 700 pp.

THE MESSIAH IN THE PENTATEUCH

The Rabbis often refer to Genesis as "The Book of Creation". In it we see everything as it must have been at the beginning -- the world, humanity, the various peoples, the Hebrew tribe, the chaos brought about by the Fall, and the first signs of the salvation promised to humanity by God. Everything is still in a nascent state, and so we cannot expect to find a fully developed conception of the Messiah there. The old Jewish literature, however, even in the creation account, finds the Messianic motif.

THE SPIRIT OF THE MESSIAH IN THE CREATION ACCOUNT

Genesis begins with the creation of heaven and earth: the earth was without form, and void. Even in this description the Talmudic Sages scented the beginning of the plan of salvation for humanity:

"The tradition of Elijah teaches that the world is to exist for six thousand years; In the first two thousand desolation; in the next two thousand the Torah will flourish and the next two thousand are the days of the Messiah but on account of our sins, which were great, things turned out as they did."¹ It was essential to this traditional expectation that the sovereignty of the Torah -- the Law of Moses -- would last 2000 years, the same as that of the Messianic period. In the same farranging discussion from which the above citation is taken we find, in explanation, that:

"The seventh millenium will be war, and at the close of the millenium the Son of David will come". In the discussion which follows mention is made of "The war of Gog and Magog and *the remaining period will be the Messianic era*, whilst the Holy One, blessed be he, will restore his world only when the seventh millenium is over."²

This so-called "Elijah Tradition", which represents the understanding of the majority of the Sages, brings to mind the mainstream Christian teaching of the Last Days and the Millennial Kingdom. When six millenia have passed, there will follow, according to some, a thousand-year Sabbath, *shabaton*. This could be the "Messianic era" after which the "world" will be renewed. 1985 AD is equivalent to the year 5745 in the Jewish calendar, which means that the Messiah ought to have come already. Something in this plan of salvation seems to have gone awry. The synagogue's official morning prayer brings this continually to mind with the words:

"Because of our sins the Temple has been destroyed and the perpetual sacrifices suspended, neither have we a consecrated priest".

The Rabbis are not, it must be said, unanimous in their doctrine of the Messianic times, but the plan of salvation does, for them, begin right back at creation. When the Bible speaks of how "the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters", they see a reference to the Messiah. The Midrash Rabbah says in this context that, "*this was the "spirit of the Messiah", as it is written in Is. 11:2, "And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him"*"³. A couple of other writings also mention that this refers to the "anointed king"⁴. This kind of hint is understandable when we bear in mind the Rabbis' view that even the names of the Messiah were determined before the creation of the world.

God's first words in the Bible are:

" 'Let there be light!' And there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good."

When we study the creation account closely we notice that it was not until the fourth day that God created the "two great lights", the sun and the moon. The Sages understood this too to be a Messianic allusion, and so the Midrash known as *Pesikhta Rabbah*, which was read from the 9th century on in connection with feast days, asks, "*Whose is this light which falls upon the congregation of the Lord?" and answers, "It is the light of the Messiah"*"⁵. The *Yalqut Shimoni*, comprising catenae of Talmudic and Midrashic passages drawn up in the 12th and 13th centuries, adds this thought to the exposition of the verse: "*This is the light of the Messiah, as is written in Psalm 36:10, 'In your light, we see light' "*"⁶

The Rabbis considered the Aramaic word Nehora, 'light', to be one of the secret names of the Messiah, since we read in the Aramaic part of the book of Daniel that, "He knows what dwells in darkness, and light dwells with him" (2.22). Furthermore, on the strength of the prophecies of Is.42:6 and 60:1--3 the Messiah is seen as "the light of the Gentiles". Did not Jesus announce that he was himself the "light of the world", and that, "Whosoever follows me will never walk in darkness"? The Midrash understands the words of Daniel chapter 2 Messianically:

" 'And Nehora dwells with him.' This is the Messiah-King, for it is written: 'Arise, shine, for your light has come' " (Is.60:1).

We can see from the above that the associative Jewish method finds Messianic allusions in places where Christians have not seen them. The Apostle Paul says that this Christ-mystery "has been kept hidden for ages and generations" (Col.1:26). Could it be possible that with these words Paul was referring to Jewish tradition? Not improbable, since we find similar expressions in the Dead Sea Scrolls.⁷

THE PROTO-EVANGEL

Part of our church's Messianic interpretation is inherited straight from Judaism. Gen. 3:15, often called the "proto-evangel", is found with a Christian explanation only from the time of Irenaeus in the second century. The NT does not refer directly to it, and it has even been claimed by some scholars that there is "no hint of Messianism in it". The Aramaic Targum tradition, however, finds a central Messianic prophecy even here.⁸

The Proto-evangel reads:

"And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

The text speaks first of the "enmity" -- or, in what would be a better translation of the Hebrew, "hatred" -- which came into the world on account of sin. Communion with God was broken and Man began to flee, to try to hide himself from His presence. The consequences of the Fall were sin, sickness and death. The Bible speaks of the personification of evil in the Devil, and the Wisdom of Solomon, an Apocryphal book from the second century before Christ, says that, "*Because of Satan's jealousy death came into the world.*"⁹ One of the Messiah's tasks is just to conquer death.

Since the style of exposition in the Midrash is, as we have seen, to try to elucidate "every single detail" of the Torah, it is worth looking at the whole message of the Proto-evangel using more or less the same of method.

According to the Rabbis the Messiah will effect a "reparation", tiquq ha- .Olam, in the world. Theologians of today have begun to discuss the concept of "rehabilitation". When Christ atoned for our sins, bore our sicknesses, and conquered death he 'rectified' the consequences of the Fall. Daniel 9:24 describes this Messianic commission more briefly and clearly as "to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness." In this way the seed of the woman is to crush the head of the serpent. These aspects of the Proto-evangel are handled figuratively in both Jewish and Christian exegesis.

The Targum of Jonathan Ben .Uzziel states here that if the woman's offspring observe the Law they will be in a position to crush the serpent's head: "*And they will finally make peace in the days of the Messiah-King*". The Targum plays on the words *aqev*, 'heel', and *iqvah*, 'end'.

The Jerusalem Targum calls attention to the endtimes when it interprets the verse as, "*They will make peace in the end, at the close of the end of the days, in the days of the Messiah King.*" The Aramaic word for

"making peace", *shefiyuta*, resembles the Hebrew word for "crush", *yeshufchah*, and some Aramaicists would accept the translation, "Finally, in the days of the Messiah King, he will be wounded in the heel." This is in keeping with verse 16 of Psalm 22, which in Christian exegesis is understood as a type of the Messiah. In many languages this verse has been translated, according to the most probable reading of the original, as, "They have pierced my hands and feet". Similarly Zechariah 13:6 in Hebrew reads:

" 'What are those wounds between your hands?' and he will answer, 'They were struck into me at the house of my friends.' "

The most common understanding of this verse among the Rabbis is illustrated by the so-called 'Jonathan's interpretation':

" 'They will be healed (from the bite of the serpent)' means that they will receive an antidote; 'Make peace' means 'peace and security'; and 'He will be their healer in the future, in the days of the Messiah' that there will be peace and rest."¹⁰

The serpent has also from early times had its own place in the exegesis of the hope of Messianic deliverance, as we shall see when we come to Jacob's blessing. During the wanderings in the wilderness Moses made a serpent of bronze, which healed the people from their snake bites when they looked upon it. 2 Ki. 18:4 relates how Hezekiah destroyed this talisman which had become a substitute for true religion: "He broke into pieces the bronze serpent Moses had made, for up to that time the Israelites had been burning incense to it; it was called 'Nehushtan' " [a piece of brass]. Such is human nature that an inanimate object can become the focus of a false worship.

I remember a delightful conversation I had in a shop with the name of 'Nehushtan' which sold copper-conductors, owned by devout Jews. I said to the distinguished looking gentleman behind the counter, "You've certainly got a good Biblical name". The man knew me and understood what I was getting at. I asked half seriously if he knew what the shop name referred to. He nodded, and asked in return, "Do you know what RaSHi (R.Solomon Ben Yitshak) says about it?" I promised to check it up, and laid down a counterchallenge: "Do you know how the Wisdom of Solomon interprets Nehushtan?" He didn't know, so I quoted from the 16th chapter of this work, which dates from before the time of Christ;

"For you gave them a token of salvation to remind them of your law's command. He who turned toward it [the brazen serpent] was saved, not by what he saw, but by you, the Saviour of all..." "You lead men down to the gates of Hades and back again."¹¹

Back home I looked up RaSHi's exposition of the subject, which ran as follows:

"It was called by the name 'Nehushtan' which is a derogatory term and is understood to mean, 'What do we need with this?' This is nothing but a serpent of bronze!"¹²

RaSHi, a Mediaeval scholar, must have known Jesus' words about being "lifted up" just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness. The pious businessman too may well have been aware of this. According to our Christian faith the cross was given as a "token of salvation". Jesus went down into Hades and rose again, taking away enmity and bringing in peace.

The Targums stress that the Messiah will come "in the end times". The Aramaic term "in the end", *be-Iqva*, resembles the notion *iqvoth meshiha*, which means the 'footsteps of the Messiah'. The Talmud contains an extended discussion of these "Messianic footsteps," signs of the end times, to which we will return in the NT section. For the Rabbis anything to do with the End Times has a Messianic flavour to it. RaDaQ, Rabbi David Qimhi -- of whom it was said, "Without him we will not find the correct way to interpret the Scriptures" -- states in connection with Is.2:2 that "everywhere the Last Days are mentioned reference is being made to the days of the Messiah."¹³ This can be seen both in the interpretation of the Proto-evangel and in those OT prophecies which contain some term referring to the Last Days.

But who is this "seed of the woman"? Why is the personal pronoun *hû*, 'he', used of it? Is 'seed' to be considered a singular or a collective noun? The Targum certainly associates 'him' with the Messiah King.

But does the 'seed' concept have Messianic implications in other contexts too? Indeed it does: the Rabbis discuss this very issue at great length. In Gen.4:25 we read (in the Hebrew and in the AV): "God has granted me another seed in place of Abel." Rabbi Tanhuma -- of whom it was said that he was "the seal of the Midrashim" -- mentions that "here we are dealing with another seed who is from another place. And who is he? He is the Messiah-King."¹⁴ Rabbi Huna says that "God prepared another seed from another place, and he is the Messiah-King."¹⁵

The promise of Abraham's seed in Gen. 22:18, which occupies a central position in Christian Theology, is also seen in the Midrashim as referring to the Messiah: "And through your seed all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice." Midrash Rabbah discusses the subject extensively and declares that "in the days of the Messiah, Israel will be compared to the sand of the sea."¹⁶ Paul, in Gal. 3:16, understood the meaning of 'Abraham's seed' in a similar way:

"The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say 'and to seeds' meaning many people, but 'and to your seed', meaning one person, who is Christ."

Here Paul uses the typical Midrash *al tiqua* formula, 'Read not so, but so' -- a promise given in the singular is taken as referring to Christ as the Messiah.

We might add that *even Midrash Ruth associates the 'seed' concept with the Messiah, when speaking of the 'kinsmanredeemer' in Ruth 4:18.* The Midrash highlights Perez, familiar from the genealogy in Matt. 1:3 and the account in Gen. chapter 38. The phrase "another seed from another place" is used again, here in reference to Perez.

It is precisely to Perez that the observation about the Messiah rectifying the havoc caused by the Fall is related. The Midrash itself mentions this as an example of "profound" understanding. The Midrash Rabbah describes as follows the new phase which began with Perez:

"This is the history of Perez and it has a profound significance. ... When the Holy One created his world there was as yet no Angel of Death... But when Adam and Eve fell into sin, all generations were corrupted. When Perez arose, history began to be fulfilled through him, because from him the Messiah would arise, and in his days the Holy One would cause death to be swallowed up, as it is written, 'He will destroy death forever'(Is. 25:8)."¹⁷

It is hardly possible in a Jewish source text to find a nearer convergence to Paul's discussion of Christ as the conqueror of death. In Romans 5:12 we read: "Therefore just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, in this way death came to all men." 1 Cor. 15:22 adds, "For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive." The roots of this mystery of the history of salvation reach right back to the account of the fall of humanity. Professor Gottlieb Klein wrote at the beginning of this century that by means of the method known as *notarikon*, one aspect of which regarded each letter of a word as the initial letter of another word, the three Hebrew letters of the word 'Adam' were interpreted as referring to Adam, David, and the Messiah.¹⁸ In this way Christ will 'correct' Adam's fall. Perhaps this is all just fanciful nonsense, but it derives from the Messianic expectation of believers who lived in ancient times.

The prominence given to the Messiah-King by the Targums öthat he will make peace in place of the Proto-evangel's enmityö is reflected in Paul's letter to the Ephesians, although it is highly unlikely that there is any intrinsic connection. In chapter 2:14'-16 we read,

"For he himself is our PEACE, who... has destroyed... HOSTILITY... to create ONE NEW MAN out of the two, thus MAKING PEACE... through the cross, by which he put to death their HOSTILITY. He came and preached PEACE..."

Although the NT does not quote the Proto-evangel directly, some trace of it can be seen in the greeting of Rom.16:20: "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with

you."

- [1.](#) *Sanhedrin* 97a.
 - [2.](#) *Sanhedrin* 97b.
 - [3.](#) *Midrash Bereshith Rabbath* 1:2 and *Yalqut, Mechiri* to psalm 139:12
 - [4.](#) *Pesikhta Rabbati* 33 and *Yalqut*.
 - [5.](#) *Pesikhta Rabbati* 62,1
 - [6.](#) *Yalqut Shimoni* 56.
 - [7.](#) *Megillath haSerachim* 8.11
 - [8.](#) The subject has been dealt with by eg. Eugen Hühn in his book *Die Messianischen Weissagungen - bis zu den targumim*, Leipzig 1899, p 135.
 - [9.](#) *The Wisdom of Solomon* 2:27
 - [10.](#) The Rabbis' explanation of Jonathan. This interpretation also corresponds to the understanding of S.H. Levey in his book *The Messianic Exegesis of the Targum*, in connection with Gen. 3:15.
 - [11.](#) *The Wisdom of Solomon* 16:7-8 and 13.
 - [12.](#) RaSHI on 2 Kings 18:4
 - [13.](#) *Mikraoth Gedoloth* in connection with Isaiah 2:2
 - [14.](#) *Bereshit Rabbah* 23.
 - [15.](#) *Ruth Rabbah* 8.
 - [16.](#) *Bamidbar Rabbah* 2.
 - [17.](#) *Shemoth Rabbah* 30. B.Pick in his extensive series of articles *Old testament Passages Messianically Applied*, (Hebraica 1885 p 31) interprets this midrash in the same way.
 - [18.](#) G. Klein, *Bilddrag till Israels Religionshistoria*, Stockholm 1898, p 11.
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THE MESSIAH WHO WILL BREAK DOWN THE HEDGE AROUND THE LAW

The search for the OT roots of the Christian faith is somewhat reminiscent of diving for pearls in the depths of the ocean. The diver first brings up a great quantity of shells from the sea bed and deposits them on the beach. The bystander sees only these outer casings until the shells are opened, upon which some may reveal a precious pearl hidden inside. Reading the old Jewish literature can be very frustrating since, for the most part, it concerns itself with the exposition of the religious ritual law, which is really of interest only to the Orthodox Jew. The spiritual and psychological dimensions so characteristic of the OT prophets are conspicuous by their almost total absence. Not infrequently, nevertheless, the tightly closed shell may yield up a rare pearl.

Although the Rabbis find 'mysteries' in the OT in far greater abundance than that to which the Christian church is accustomed, they still frequently stress the words of Deut. 29:29: "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children for ever."

Mental and spiritual concepts must, by their very nature, be described figuratively. We cannot explain precisely what, for example, 'faith', 'hope', or 'love' is. By the same token, the Messianic mystery has, as it were, created its own secret code, which must be "cracked" before it will be understood. One of the toughest nuts is Gen.38:29 on the son of Judah and Tamar:

" 'So this is how you have broken out!' And he was named Perez."

We have already come across the discussion associated with the name of Perez, regarding the Messiah as the conqueror of death. *Ben Parets*, "son of Perez" is actually one of the best known cryptic Messiah epithets. In Matthew's genealogy of Jesus the name appears in the form 'Phares': "And Judah begat Phares." (Matt. 1:3 AV) Therefore Jesus was, in a sense the 'Son of Perez'.

The 'Seal of the Midrashim', R. Tanhuma Bar Abba, speaks again and again of the Messiah in connection with Perez. "He is the final saviour, the Messiah-King." Tanhuma states that *there are sinners who through their falling have sustained great loss, and those who have benefitted from their misdemeanours.*

"Thus Judah profited, because from him came forth Perez and Hezron from whom are descended David and the Messiah-King, he who will save Israel. Behold how great the difficulties the Holy One indeed gave until he was to raise up the Messiah-King from Judah, he of whom it is written, "And the spirit of the Lord will be upon him."¹⁹

The Midrash Rabbah discusses this verse at greater length. Firstly the half-humorous observation is made that,

"Judah was busy taking a wife, while the Holy One, blessed be He, was creating the light of the Messiah."²⁰

One of the Rabbinic expository works known as "The Priestly Gift" says of this that, *"The last Saviour is the Messiah, the Son of David, who is descended from Judah's son Perez,"* and the Midrash part continues, *"This is the Messiah-King; as it is written, 'A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse' and 'The Lord will extend your mighty sceptre from Zion.' "* (Is. 11:1 and Ps. 110:2) The Rabbis' explanation adds: *"This is the Messiah, who will soon appear, because it is written of him that, 'One who breaks open the way [Heb. pores, from the same root as Peres] will go up before them.' "* (Micah 2:13)

It is important to take note of the Bible passages mentioned above. They illustrate a method by which *weakly founded Messianic prophecies are set in their larger context.* We see furthermore that the Targums and Midrashim generally speak of the 'Messiah-King', and not so much of some nebulous 'Messiah concept'.

RaMBaN (R. Moses Ben Nahman), who lived towards the end of the 13th century, describes the birth of Perez as follows:

"He was encircled by a hedge, and he was enclosed within it. That is why it is said 'So this is how you have broken through the hedge and come out from within it'." Perez was the first-born, "The first-born through the power of the Most High, as it is written, 'I will give to him a first-born son'. This was written about the holy person who is to come, David, the King of Israel -- long may he live. Those who are wise will understand."²¹

What would 'those who are wise' understand, and what is meant by 'breaking through the hedge'? Historically this well depicts what happened when Christianity broke out of the Judaic mould, as we can see from the following.

The Rabbis speak a great deal about the 'hedge of the Law'. Galatians 4:4--5 says that Jesus "was born under law" and "redeemed those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons." "It is for freedom," Paul continues, "that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery"(5:1). "If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law"(5:18). *From being a gift, the Law in Judaism can become an enslaving yoke.*

In the Judaism of today there are officially 613 commands and prohibitions. It would appear that the development into a religion of law took place at a very early stage. The prophet Isaiah wrote ca. 700 years before Christ that instead of being the 'word of repose' religion had become a demand:

"Do and do, do and do, rule on rule, rule on rule; a little here, a little there -- so that they will go and fall backwards, be injured and snared and captured" (28:10--13), and that the fear of God was nothing more than "rules taught by men" (29:13). The Targum of Jonathan explains that God made Man of 248 bones and 365 sinews, the number of days in the solar year (together = 613). *In addition to these 'thou shalt' and 'thou shalt not' commands there was a separate group of ancillary commands which made up the 'hedge around the Law'.* In the shelter of this fold the devout Jew had to live.

Jesus, in his teaching, was forced to speak about this very misapplication. Referring to the words of Isaiah quoted above, he added that:

"They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men... Then the disciples came to him and asked, 'Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this?' He replied, 'Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots. Leave them alone' " (Matt. 15:8--14).

Thus Jesus truly broke through the hedge of the Law.

Moses, when he instituted the commandments, said to the people,

"Hear now, O Israel, the decrees and laws I am about to teach you... Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it!"²²

Jewish scholars have, of course, tried to give the *taryag*, the 613 precepts, a foundation in the Pentateuch, but in both these and in the *seyag*, the ancillary rules, there are elements which the Rabbis themselves would concede have no basis in the written law. Precisely these *halakha* or traditional precepts are one of modern Israel's most difficult internal problems.

Paul spoke about this 'hedge around the Law' in Ephesians 2:14--15;

"For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has DESTROYED THE BARRIER, THE DIVIDING WALL of hostility, by ABOLISHING in his flesh the LAW WITH ITS COMMANDMENTS AND REGULATIONS. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace."

By this "dividing wall" and "law with its commandments and regulations" we can only understand 'the hedge around the Law'. Christ, by his sacrificial death, has broken it down. "And they who are wise shall understand", claimed RaMBaN.

Isaiah 8:14, which the *Talmud* interprets as signifying "the Messiah, Son of David"²³, describes this same 'breaking through', which is connected with the Perez illustration: "He will be a sanctuary, a rock of offence and stone of stumbling to both the houses of Israel, a snare and a trap to the inhabitants of Jerusalem." All of these features are well applicable to Jesus: he was "the first-born through the power of the Most High", he unintentionally created a breach between the mother and daughter religions, and he became "the stone which the builders rejected".

Midrash Rabbah attaches the 'Messiah Ben Phares' illustration to the prophecy in Micah 2:13: "One who breaks open the way will go up before them... the LORD will be at their head." RaSHI, Rabbi Shlomo Yitshak (1040--1105), who expounded in his writings the whole Talmud and OT, said of Perez that *he is "their saviour, the one who will break open the way"*. RaDaQ, Rabbi David Qimhi, declares that "*the one who breaks open the way is Elijah, and their king is the Branch, the Son of David*". Micah's reference to the concept of the 'one who will break open the way' is natural since the Hebrew word for this, *porets*, is derived from the same root as Perez.

The Christian will no doubt understand well this constant reference in much of the Jewish literature to the herald of the Messiah who will prepare the way for him. The *Metsudat David*, a popular 17th century Jewish exposition of the Prophetic and Historic books, explains the prophecy of Micah as meaning that:

"Elijah will come before the time of salvation to turn the hearts of Israel to their Heavenly Father in order to be a herald of salvation to them... but by the 'king' is meant the Messiah-King, and the Lord will come before them all, because at that time he will also give back his Holy Spirit to Zion."²⁴

It is amazing to see that in the writings of the most widely recognised Jewish exegetes there are thoughts associated with the name of Perez which can help us to understand the Plan of Salvation and some of Paul's more difficult teachings. Not infrequently, however, these pearls are buried deep in the ocean of tradition, concealed within a protective shell.

[19.](#) *Midrash Tanhuma, Bereshit va-Yeshev*. Isaiah 61:1-3.

[20.](#) *Midrash Bereshith Rabbah*, par. 85

[21.](#) *Mikraot Gedoloth*, corresponding section.

[22.](#) See Deut. 4:1-2, Proverbs 31:6 and Joshua 1:7

[23.](#) *Sanhedrin* 38a.

[24.](#) *Mikraoth Gedoloth* on Micah 2:13

THE MESSIAH WHO WILL RULE THE NATIONS

It has been often emphasized by Christian scholars that the "Critical science admits only two pre-prophetic texts from the OT literature as Messianic", the first of which being Jacob's blessing. Christian exegesis contents itself here with the general statement that the Messiah is of the root of the tribe of Judah. The old Jewish interpretation sees a Messianic reference in the very first words of that blessing, which speak about 'the end of the days'. As we have already seen in Rabbi Qimhi's name, "*Everywhere that there is mention made of the last days, the days of the Messiah are intended.*"

The saying 'the end of the days' makes its first appearance in the Bible in Jacob's blessing, in Gen. 49:1; "Then Jacob called for his sons and said: 'Gather around so that I can tell you what will happen to you *at the end of the days.*' " The blessing which Judah received speaks of the Messiah as the ruler of the nations. *All the expository works of the Rabbis beginning with the Targumim and Midrashim see here a clear Messianic prophecy.* The various shades of the Messianic expectation can be seen in their interpretations almost as if refracted through a prism. Verses 11 and 12 read:

"The sceptre will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs, and the obedience of the nations is his. He will tether his donkey to a vine, his colt to the choicest branch; he will wash his garments in wine, his robes in the blood of grapes."

In Christian theology and in Judaism the attempt has been made to deny altogether the doctrine of the 'end times'. Martin Buber, a Jewish professor considered a master of religious dialogue, once told me in a private conversation an old anecdote bearing on Jacob's blessing: The Holy Spirit departed from Jacob, the story goes, when he mentioned the 'last days'. "Personally", Buber explained, "I completely reject eschatology [the doctrine of the end times]. Eschatology is not history, neither is history eschatology. The prophets were not fortunetellers; they wished to reveal what was necessary and relevant to their own time, just as God reveals himself in each age according to our needs."

I can well understand Buber's attitude. It brings to mind the words found in the Dead Sea Scrolls, that the prophets recorded of the visions they received "*only that which is needful for Mankind*".²⁵ Even Midrash Rabbah maintains that, "*Jacob wished to reveal the end times, but they were hidden from him*".²⁶

But can we prove anything about the historical background of this blessing? Is it possible that it actually did originate in Jacob's time, or is it later? Are the patriarchal accounts mere fireside stories, as modern exegetes sometimes openly assert? What do the Targum, Midrash and the Rabbinic literature have to say about its Messianic character?

The archaeologist W.F. Albright has made some interesting observations on Jacob's blessing. He claims that it was not of course written down before the 11th century BC, but it nevertheless derives from a much older

tradition.²⁷ We know nowadays about the so-called Mari texts from Mesopotamia, written on over 20,000 clay tablets.²⁸ Albright shows from the Mari text mule-sacrifice descriptions that the same three words for 'colt' used in Jacob's blessing are found in Northern Mesopotamia, even in the same order. Similarly the phrase 'the blood of grapes' resembles an old Ugaritic expression 'tree-blood' which was used of wine. Such being the case, Jacob's blessing is based on a very old tradition.

If we take into consideration the fact that the Babylonian king Hammurabi conquered and destroyed the city of Mari in 1759 BC, according to the average reckoning, or in 1695 BC by the later estimation, there is no reason to doubt that, from a linguistic point of view, Jacob's blessing is from Jacob's own time. The well-known orientalist E.W. Hengstenberg mentions the Arabic poets Lebid and Hareth, the former of which composed a poem on his death bed at the age of 157, and the latter recited poetry when he was 135 years old -- in any case at a very advanced age, even if there should prove to be exaggeration in the accounts of how long they lived. With the increase of literacy in humanity there has been a corresponding decrease in the capacity for memorisation. Jacob's blessing does not lend itself to dissection by modern methods of criticism.²⁹

Christian exegesis has considered Jacob's blessing Messianic since the time of Justin Martyr in the middle of the second century. The Jewish Messianic understanding of this text is founded on older material. Targum Onqelos says of Judah's sceptre that it will not depart "*until the Messiah comes, he who has the power to reign*". Targum Jonathan puts it that the verse refers to "*the age of the Messiah-King, the King who will come as the youngest of his children*". Targum Yerushalmi speaks of the 'time' when "*the Messiah-King will come*".

The Midrash literature attaches to the blessing additional features based on the nature of the Hebrew language. Midrash Rabbah states that,

" 'The sceptre will not depart from Judah... until Shilo ('he') come', this is the Messiah-King... 'Judah's sceptre' means the Great Synagogue, the Sanhedrin, which was struck and which collapsed... until Shilo come."

In this connection the Wise discuss such matters as the ancestry of the celebrated Rabbi Hillel and declare that, "A genealogical table was found in Jerusalem which said that he was descended from David". "*He will tether his donkey to a vine*" , the Midrash continues, "*means the city which he has chosen*" [the unusual word *îyroh* used here for 'donkey' or 'colt' sounds the same as *îyrô* 'his city', ie. Jerusalem]. Then follows a shattering observation:

"Rabbi Hanin said that Israel will not require the teaching of the Messiah-King, because in Is. 11:10 it is written; 'In that day the Gentiles will rally to the root of Jesse', but not Israel. If this is so, why will the Messiah-King come, and what will he do? He will bring Israel back from their dispersion and give them 30 [new] precepts."³⁰

The commentary known as 'The Priestly Gift' explains what this means from the point of view of the Torah or Law:

"The Messiah-King will clearly elucidate for them the Torah and the errors into which they have thus far fallen... The 30 precepts are ordinances which the nations of the world must observe".³¹ It is significant that the Midrash doubts whether Israel will receive the Messiah's teachings. At the same time the possibility is entertained that the Rabbis might have been mistaken. Generally it is strictly maintained that *even the words of a Rabbi's disciples are given by the Holy Spirit, and that "The fear of a Rabbi is the same as the fear of God"*. This is connected psychologically with the child's relationship with his parents: "*Just as a man is commanded to respect and fear his father, so he must respect and fear his Rabbi more than his father.*"³²

It is this point which is indirectly at issue in Mark 7:9--13 where we see Jesus opposing the Rabbis' custom of freeing a person from his duties to his parents if he gives a Corban gift to the Temple. In this way the word of God was nullified by the traditions of men. The Midrash goes as far as to assert that, "...all decisions to be hereafter given by eminent scholars already existed and were communicated as law to Moses from Sinai". ³³

Midrash Tanhuma proposes the following in its discussion of Judah's portion of Jacob's blessing:

"Why did your brothers praise you, Judah [v.8]? Because all Israel would be called 'Jews' after you; and not only for that reason, but also because the Messiah will be your descendent, he who will save Israel; as it is written, 'A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse' (Is. 11:1)." ³⁴

And indeed, in every corner of the world where we find Jews we find in them a people who were called to make known the coming of Christ and his redemptive work.

The Midrash Rabbah on Lamentations, one of the six oldest Midrashim, speaks of Israel as a "virgin, the daughter of Judah". It appends to this a long discussion, which also appears in the Talmud, of the name of the Messiah, concluding with the word '*Shilo*' from Jacob's blessing. Lamentations 1:15--17 reads;

"In his winepress the LORD has trampled the Virgin Daughter of Judah. This is why I weep . . . for no-one is near to comfort me . . . Zion stretches out her hands, but there is no-one to comfort her."

The Midrash elaborates on these words as follows;

" 'My eyes overflow with tears, for no-one is near to comfort me, no-one to restore my spirit', thus Israel is called the 'eye of the Holy One'. . . 'The comforter that should restore my spirit is far from me'; and what is the name of the Messiah-King? . . . The LORD is his name, because Jer. 23:6 says, 'This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD our Righteousness . . .' The 'BRANCH' is his name, because Zech. 6:12 states, 'Behold, here is the man whose name is the Branch, and he will branch out from his place . . .' 'COMFORTER' is his name, because it is written, 'The comforter is far from me'."

Then the Midrash introduces also the name 'LEBANON', which refers to the Temple, because Is. 10:34 says, "Lebanon will fall before the Mighty One".

" 'SHILO' is his name, because it is written in Gen. 49:10, 'Until Shilo comes'. . . 'MERCY' is his name, because Jer. 16:13 says, 'And I will show you no mercy'. . . 'YINNON' is his name, as Ps. 72:17 says, 'Before the sun was, his name was Yinnon.' (That is, 'may he sprout') ³⁵

The Messiah's name, the Rabbis maintain, is one of the seven things which were ordained before creation. ³⁶ These names describe the nature of the Messiah's mission. If we do not take into account the Biblical way of thinking which underlies these concepts we might well conclude, as one critic did, that they are "enigmatic or half-humorous". ³⁷ Nevertheless, it is specifically here that we can see the full gamut of the earliest Jewish Messianic expectation.

But what is meant by the phrase 'until Shilo comes'?

Jewish scholars find meanings for the Hebrew word '*Shilo*' which are unknown to Christian Theology. Some see in it the root *shâlêv* which means 'peaceable', and from that can then be derived *shalvâh*, 'peace'. In other words, the Messiah is the Prince of Peace. Some scholars maintain that *shilo* in its original form was *moshlô*, 'their ruler', making the Messiah the Ruler of the Nations. RaSHI -- the leading OT and Talmudic exegete of the Middle Ages who also had a particular affection for the Targums -- says of *Shilo* that,

"He is the Messiah-King and his (*shelo*) is sovereign power. This is how Onqelos understood the matter. The Midrash explains it with the words *shai loh*, 'gifts for him', because Ps. 76:12 says, 'Let them bring gifts to the One to be feared'. ³⁸

And so the idea of the 'one to be feared', MORAH, also became an epithet for the Messiah. The Gospels tell us here and there that those who heard Jesus were overcome with great fear.³⁹

When the Rabbis begin to open up the Bible's secret '*hints*', the *remazim*, they wish at the same time to reinforce ideas already current in the synagogue. In one of these methods of interpretation, known as *gematria*, the numeric value of the letters of words were counted and then compared with other words yielding the same value. This method is founded upon the statement in the Wisdom of Solomon 11:22 that, "*God has prepared everything according to measure, number, and weight*".

But what did the sages find out about the 'Shilo' idea with the help of their *gematria*? *The numeric value of 'Shilo will come', yavô shilôh, is 358, which corresponds exactly to that of mashiah, 'Messiah'. The gematria value of nahash, 'snake', is also 358.* Gottlieb Klein wrote that in terms of the Jewish mystical *Qabbalah* this meant that "*the Messiah is to crush the head of the serpent*".⁴⁰ Such observations have no scientific basis, but they illustrate the Rabbis' understanding that the Messiah will overthrow the corruption of sin. This same expectation is reflected in 1 John 3:8, "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil".

And what significance do the images of the Donkey and the Vine have?

The Talmud and Midrash Tan .huma have devoted particular attention to the symbols of the donkey and the vine in Jacob's blessing. *The vine is most commonly understood to mean Israel, and the strange word for 'donkey', îyrôh, as 'his city' (Heb. 'city'= îyr, 'his city = îyrô), in other words 'Jerusalem', where the Messiah is to arrive.* Both of these words are also understood in their primary sense. *When discussing the donkey, reference is made to Moses, "who took his wife and sons and put them on a donkey" (Ex.4:20) and likewise to the "second Moses", the Messiah, as "he is lowly and riding upon a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey" (Zech.9:9).* Thus will the Messiah humble himself.⁴¹

"Our Rabbi Obadiah" describes Jacob's blessing as follows:⁴²

"The Messiah will not come on a warhorse, for he is the King of Peace... On the other hand 'he will tether his donkey to a vine', which means that his kingdom of peace will reign in Israel, which is likened to a vine... And when it is made known that he comes in peace then will the nations obey him... And the weak, who are left behind, will hear him and return to him."

In the Talmud it is said that *if someone dreams about a donkey, he may hope for the Messianic salvation.*⁴³ Both the Talmudic and the Zohar traditions state that, if someone "*dreams of a vine he may look forward to seeing the Messiah, for it is written: 'He will tether his donkey to a vine'*".⁴⁴ The symbols of the donkey and the vine are further set in relief by the fact that in Aramaic both words are written in exactly the same way in the unpointed writing: hamara, 'donkey', and hamra, 'vine'. These Aramaic words do not, of course, appear in the Hebrew OT text.

The most natural points of comparison for Jesus' work are found among these Jewish Messianic expectations. He rode into 'his own city' choosing a donkey as a sign of lowliness and subjection. There is a hint in this which we find also discussed in the Talmud:

"The Son of David will come only in a generation which is either altogether righteous or altogether wicked. '*In a generation which is altogether righteous;*' as it is written: 'Then will your people be righteous and they will possess the land for ever' (Is 60:21). Or '*altogether wicked;*' as it is written: 'He saw that there was no-one, and he was appalled that there was no-one to intercede' (Is 59:16)..."

'And behold, one like a son of man, coming in the clouds' (Dan.7:13). It is also written, 'gentle and riding on a donkey' (Zech 9:9): if they are righteous he will come in the clouds. If not, he will come humbly and riding on a donkey."⁴⁵

The comparison of the Messiah to a vine also appears in the NT. Jesus declared in the 15th chapter of John that, "I am the true vine and my Father is the gardener... Remain in me and I will remain in you". It is perfectly possible that the traditional thoughts preserved in the Talmud regarding hopes attending pious dreams were known even in Jesus' time. The background of the Vine allegory can thus be better understood.

In their translations of Gen. 49:12, Targums Jonathan and Yerushalmi speak of "*the eyes of the Messiah-King*". *How beautiful they are, "as resplendent as wine"* -- the AV has it that they are "red with wine". The Septuagint (the Greek translation of the OT made ca. 200 BC) however, follows more or less the same interpretation as the Targums. *The Revelation of St. John, which in the words of the Mediaeval Rabbi Abraham Ben Ezra was written "under the power of the Holy Spirit" and was "acceptable for all Jews to read"*, says three times about Jesus' eyes that they were like "a flame of fire".⁴⁶ The Gospels tell us how Jesus "looked at" the rich young man "and loved him", and how he "turned and looked straight at Peter" who, broken by that glance, started to weep bitterly.⁴⁷

Franz Delitzsch drew attention to the fact that the Proto-evangel speaks of "him" in its account of the "woman's seed", aiming collectively at the salvation promised to "the whole of humanity"; the promise given to the Patriarchs was given in the singular through the Messiah as a "seed" which would impart a blessing to all peoples. In this case, however, the issue of Jacob's blessing would seem primarily to concern the "tribe" of Judah, and here we have the beginning of a certain nationalistic "narrowing down".⁴⁸

The Messiah depicted in Jacob's blessing is nevertheless the Ruler of the nations. We see in this a vision of a salvation which is universal in its intent. The Hebrew word for 'ruler's staff', *me hôqêq*, means literally 'lawgiver' -- thus the Rabbinic emphasis that, "*the Messiah will clearly elucidate the Torah*". The Rabbis question whether Israel will need the Messiah's teaching, since the Gentiles will obey him. Nevertheless he will come "to his own city".

The Jews have dreamed of the Messiah as a noble "vine," something which is brought out by the Hebrew word *sôrêqâh* (Gen. 49:11), 'a vine yielding purple grapes', the richest variety. The Messiah will not be prepared for war but rather will come as the Prince of Peace. He will cleanse his people with the "blood of grapes". And all Israel will, on account of the blessing Judah received, be called 'Jews'. The main thing, however, is that the Messiah will be descended from him. In this way Jacob's blessing already reflects all the shades of the Jewish Messiah expectation as if seen refracted through a prism.

^{25.} *Masechet Megilah* 14a.

^{26.} *Midrash Bereshith Rabbah* par 98.

^{27.} W.F. Albright, *The Biblical Period from Abraham to Ezra*, New York 1963, p12.

^{28.} A. Malamt, *Mari and the Bible. A Collection of Studies*, Jerusalem 1977 - articles in Hebrew and English

^{29.} E.W. Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament*, p.28.

^{30.} *Midrash Bereshith Rabbah* par 98.

^{31.} *Matanoth Kehuna*, corresponding section.

^{32.} *Hilchot Talmud Torah* 10:5

^{33.} *Midrash Qoheleth Rabbati* 1.

^{34.} *Midrash Tanhuma, Bereshith vayehi*, 64.

^{35.} *Midrash Rabbah De-eicha* 1:16. See also Sanhedrin 98b.

^{36.} *Pesahim* 54a and *Nedarim* 39b.

^{37.} S. Mowinckel, *He That Cometh*, p293 - "enigmatic or half-humorous".

^{38.} *Mikraoth Gedoloth*, corresponding section.

^{39.} Luke 5:26, 7:16, 8:25 and 37

^{40.} Gottlieb Klein, *Sex föredrag*, p.113.

- [41.](#) See eg. Strack-Billerbeck 1, pp842-3
[42.](#) *Mikraoth Gedoloth, Sipureinu*, the "explanation of Our Rabbi Obadiah".
[43.](#) *Berakoth* 56a.
[44.](#) *Berakoth* 57a.
[45.](#) *Sanhedrin* 97b.
[46.](#) Revelation 1:14, 2:18 and 19:12
[47.](#) Mark 10:21 and Luke 22:61. The Septuagint uses the phrase *kharopoi*, 'making glad'.
[48.](#) Franz Delitzsch, *Messianische Weissagungen*, pp40-1.

THE MESSIAH AS THE SECOND MOSES

The Rabbinic literature often presents parallels between similar types of fact. Sometimes this comparison is developed by the *qal' va- Hômer* principle -- from the simple to the more complex; sometimes the matter is brought to life with an appropriate illustration. Likewise the Messianic concept has created its own figurative language. *One of the most frequently used parallels is the likening of the Messiah to the "first saviour", Moses.*

Amongst Christians a similar parallelism appears as early as Jesus' statement that, "If you believed Moses you would believe me, because he wrote about me" (John 5:46). Those who listened to him sometimes exclaimed, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote" (John 1:45). When speaking about the Messiah, Christian theologians sometimes use the concept *Moses redivivus*, 'Moses brought back to life', or the 'new' Moses. This notion is derived from a verse to which both Peter and Stephen refer in the Acts of the Apostles (3:22 and 7:37).

In Deut. 18:15 and 18--19 we find the promise that:

"The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him... I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth... If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account.' "

The prophecy above emphasises the fact that the promised prophet will speak in the name of God and with his authority. Jewish exegetes reckon that reference is being made here to Joshua the son of Nun or to the 'prophet of the nations', Jeremiah. It seems, however, more reasonable to consider, as Rabbi Levi Ben Gershom has said, that these verses speak of the Messiah:

"Truly, the Messiah is such a prophet, as the Midrash states, 'Behold, my servant will prosper'(Is. 52:13)... By means of the miracles he performed Moses succeeded in getting only one nation to serve God, but the Messiah will cause all the peoples on earth to serve him."⁴⁹

The Targum attaches an interpretation to this verse which from the point of view of Christian theology is of great importance:

"The Lord your God will raise up from your midst a prophet by the Holy Spirit who will be like me", and, "A prophet I will raise up from amongst your brethren, through the Holy Spirit."⁵⁰

Once again we encounter a Messianic expectation in which there are as it were supra-historical features: God will give his people a prophet who will speak in his name, who will be conceived by the Holy Spirit, and whose work will be characterised by the performance of miracles. There is a danger in the method known as the 'historico-prophetic perspective' of eliminating these mystical features from the ancient Messianic expectation. Furthermore, proceeding in this way does not do justice to the Messianic hope as it actually appeared in history, despite invoking the name of historical-criticism. At the same time, as we have seen, the New Testament's Christology is narrowed down. It may well be that Rabbinic exegesis spiritualises and allegorises, that it indulges in exaggerated symbolism -- but the NT does precisely the same; it is one of the peculiar characteristics of Messianic expectation.

The Messiah as the Last Saviour

When we speak of the Messiah as the 'second Moses' we encounter in the old Jewish writings a wide spectrum of thought and a broad view of salvation history. The best way to get these aspects into perspective is probably to resort to sub-headings, which will reduce what has to be said into smaller, more easily digestible bites.

The Midrash literature on Moses speaks of the 'First' and the 'Last' Saviours. Midrash Rabbah on Ecclesiastes relates how R. Berechiah said in the name of R. Yits .hak, who lived before the year 300 AD, that:

"Just as there was a First Saviour so there will be a Last. Just as it is said of the First Saviour (Ex. 4:20) that 'He took his wife and sons and put them on a donkey', so it is said of the Last Saviour that 'He is lowly and riding on a donkey'(Zech. 9:9). As the First Saviour provided manna (Ex. 16), as it is written, 'Behold I will pour out bread from heaven upon you,' so will the Last Saviour, as it is written (Ps. 72:16), 'Let corn abound throughout the land'. Just as the First Saviour opened a fountain, so the Last Saviour will provide water, as it is written (Joel 3:18), 'A fountain will flow out of the LORD'S house'."⁵¹

In the corresponding parallel passage R. Yits .hak Bar Maryon (ca. 290--320 AD) says that, "*At the end, the LORD himself will appear and provide manna from heaven.*"

All four gospels one after the other record Jesus' miracles of the feeding of the multitudes. Just before his Passion Jesus chided the disciples on the way to Caesarea Philippi for their concern about what they would eat on the journey:

"Do you still not understand? Don't you remember the five loaves for the five thousand... or the seven loaves for the four thousand?" (Matt. 16:9--10)

And Jesus spoke of himself as the Bread of Life:

"I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world... I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty" (John 6:32--5).

Jesus presented himself to the Samaritan woman as the Spring of Living Water:

"If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water... Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (John 4:10,12--13).

On the other hand Jesus proclaimed that,

"If a man is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him" (John 7:37--8).

The figures of both the bread and of the water are associated with the Messianic mission as the 'Second Moses' and the 'Last Saviour'.

Comparisons between Moses and Jesus.

The Midrash uses the comparative phrase, "as it was, so it will be". We also find close scrutiny of the parallels between Jesus and Moses not infrequently in Christian literature. It has led to the inference that Jesus is somekind of 'Moses redivivus'. What contributory factors do we see there? Firstly, Moses' parents were Levites, so it was natural for him to give teaching about the worship of God to his people. Jesus too devoted himself to his high priestly commission -- the letter to the Hebrews speaks of this some fifteen times. On Moses' birth, newborn baby boys in Egypt were persecuted, and likewise when Jesus was born the sound of children's crying was heard in Bethlehem. Moses spent 40 years in the desert of Midian as a

shepherd. Jesus too showed himself to be the good shepherd who searches out his lost sheep. In one well-known story of the Rabbis there is a description of Moses carrying a stray lamb to a well. A voice is then heard from heaven to say, "Because you have shown mercy to a creature of flesh and blood, I will make you the shepherd of your people".

Moses came to Egypt to liberate his brothers from slavery; Jesus came to redeem us from the yoke of sin. Moses was the leader of his people; Jesus went before his disciples. Moses gave the tables of the Covenant; Jesus wished to write the dual commandment of Love in believers' hearts. Moses also served as a judge; similarly, Jesus stressed that all judgement was entrusted to the Son, that all may honour the Son. Moses prayed for those who opposed and maligned him, such as Miriam. When the people had been worshipping the golden calf Moses called out, "Whoever is for the LORD, come to me". He prayed, "Please forgive their sin -- but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written" (Ex. 32:26,32); in the same way Jesus said, "Come to me all who are heavy laden and weary, and I will give you rest," and he prayed on the cross for the malefactors. Moses was "a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth" (Num. 12:3); Jesus too was "meek and lowly in heart". Such comparisons show that Jesus really was the promised prophet who would be "like Moses".

The character of the revelation of God to Moses.

Moses' relationship with God differed from that of his predecessors. Jewish writers often put so much emphasis on the ordinances of the Pentateuch that Moses' personal devotional life is ignored. Christians, for their part, often caricature the "religion of Moses" as the religion of vengeance, the religion which demands "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth". But does this tally with the revelation of God which Moses received?

In the early stages of his vocation Moses heard the word of God: "I am the LORD. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as God Almighty, *but by my name the LORD I did not make myself known to them.*" (Ex. 6:2--3) When Miriam and Aaron maligned Moses God said to them,

"Listen to my words: When a prophet of the LORD is among you, I reveal myself to him in visions, I speak to him in dreams. But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house. With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles; *he sees the form of the LORD*" (Num. 12:6-8).

What does it mean that Moses knew God "by his name the LORD", and what is the significance of him "seeing the form of the LORD"?

The leading Mediaeval Talmud and OT expositor RaSHI states that apparently Moses did not actually see the "form of the LORD" but it was as if in a "spoken vision" or in a "Holy Spirit vision", and as if from behind.⁵² Jacob was another who saw the face of God when, by the stream Jabbok, he wrestled with the "Angel of the Presence" (lit. 'of the faces'), Peniel, and said, "I have seen God face to face, and yet my life was spared" (Gen. 32:30, Is. 63:9). Jacob's vision was more an angelic vision in which, according to the Rabbis -- as we shall see later -- the Messiah appeared. But how is it possible that Moses could actually have "seen" God, since before the verse concerned he is told, "But you cannot see my face, for no-one may see me and live" (Ex. 33:20)? Could it be that what is meant by "seeing the form" of the LORD is that Moses came to understand something of the "inner being" of God?

The Bible does not, however, speak of God as an abstract idea but as a person. There is a danger in present Judaism of handling God agnostically or in a deistic way, just as if he was not the God of revelation, *Deus revelatus*. In this way the thinking goes that a *demiurge* created the world but left it then to its own devices. This danger in Judaism is partly a reaction to Christianity, in its emphasis that "the word became flesh" and "was made manifest in the flesh" (John 1:14 and 1.Tim. 3:16) -- God became a man. Even though the oldest

Jewish writings imply a divine origin in speaking of the Messiah, this 'incarnation', Christ's becoming a man, is one of its greatest stumbling blocks. It was for this reason that RaMBaM, Maimonides, formed the 3rd of his 13 articles of faith, which states:

"I believe with perfect faith that the Creator, blessed be his name, is not corporeal and that he is free from all the accidents of matter, and that he has not any form whatsoever."⁵³

As early as the time of the Jewish philosopher Philo in the first Christian century the custom of avoiding the name of God began to take root. The circumlocutions "the Name", *ha-Shem*, and 'the Place', *ha-Maqom*, were used in its stead. Indeed God promised when giving the commandments that, "In every place that I cause my name to be honoured, I will come to you and bless you" (Ex. 20:24).

In the Creation account God says: "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness... So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him" (Gen. 1:26--7). There are two Hebrew words here *tselem*, 'image' (in modern Hebrew, 'photograph'), and *demuth*, 'figure' or 'similitude'. When Moses is allowed to look at the "form of the LORD" the word *temunah* is used, which in its primary sense means a 'drawing'. *All of these expressions are very concrete. God is a person and he has a definite form and being. This was experienced by Moses on a deeper level than by his predecessors.*

We could not conceive of God as being material. Still, he has revealed himself in a form which "the material person can understand". The religion of Moses was not just a general Creator-belief in the Almighty. In what, then, lies the difference between the religion of the Patriarchs and that of Moses? The Jerusalem Talmud states that the Patriarchs knew only the '*God of heaven, but God did not reveal to them the Lord's MIMRA*'. This Aramaic word MIMRA the Rabbis often identified with the Messiah. It corresponds to the Greek *logos* or 'word'. Targum Jonathan says that, "*My name the LORD I did not, however, reveal to them through my Holy Spirit.*"

The name of the Lord as a sign of salvation

But who is this Lord who revealed himself to Moses? Abraham, after all, built an altar to the Lord; but it was reserved for Moses to hear this name and its explanation from the burning bush (Ex. 3:14). The word "LORD" appears approx. 6700 times in the OT. In its Hebrew form *Yahweh* it highlights the presence of God. The words 'was', 'is', and 'is to be' can be formed from its root letters. *The Past, Present, and Future -- the whole "trinity" contained in the concept of time -- are united in God's essential being.* When Moses enquired about the name of God he received in reply the answer, "I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you'." God is! He is the key to the whole of reality.

In the revelation of God in the Burning Bush the word *anochi*, 'I', which God uses of himself, is given as an *ôth* or 'sign'. Small wonder that the Midrash sees here a reference to the Messiah:

"And he said, 'I (*anochi*) will be with you' and 'This will be the sign to you' (v 12); What do these words mean? Our Sages, blessed be their memory, say that, 'It is symbolic of the first deliverance, for with an *anochi* Israel came into Egypt, as it is said, 'I (*anochi*) will go with you into Egypt and with an *anochi* I will lead you back from there (Gen. 46:4)'. It is also symbolic of the latter redemption, as it is said, 'I (*anochi*) will heal you and [in the Messianic times] save you'."

And indeed, the name of the Messiah in Isaiah 7:14 is Immanu-EL, 'God (is) with us', and he will speak in the name of God.

The Talmud Sages too see in the name *Yahweh* a reference to the Messiah: "*Three things were created on the basis of the name of the Holy One: the Righteous, the Messiah, and Jerusalem.*"⁵⁴ The thought about the Messiah is inferred here from Jeremiah 23:6 and 33:16, according to which God will raise up to David a Righteous Branch; "And this is the name by which he will be called: The LORD our righteousness". Rabbis

Shmuel Ben Nahman (ca.260 AD) and Abba Bar Kahana (ca.300 AD) came to the conclusion that, "*this is the name of the Messiah*".⁵⁵ Christian interpretation usually understands the name *Yahweh* to mean 'the Lord of the covenant'.

The early Christian church also saw in *Yahweh* more than a hint of Messianism. In their use of the so-called "translation of the Seventy", the 'Septuagint', in which the Hebrew '*Yahweh*' is translated by the Greek '*Kyrios*', the early Christians understood it as referring to Christ. It is certainly true that Jesus acted with the authority of God, preaching that, "No-one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father"... "He who looks at me sees the One who sent me"... "I and the Father are one"... "Come to me"... "Learn from me"... "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life". *This is highlighted by the early church's briefest creed: "Jesus Christ is Lord!"* (Phil. 2:11). The sign of the Latter Redemption is precisely here in the way our Saviour used the word 'I', which proves his lordship.

Did Moses believe in an avenging God or in a God of mercy?

In the 33rd chapter of Exodus we read that, "The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend". And Moses prayed, "If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us?" (vv 11,15--16)

When Moses carved out two new stone tablets to replace those which he had broken in his wrath, the "*LORD*" passed in front of him, then he heard the Old Testament's most beautiful hymn of grace which is repeated over and over in the Prophets and in the Psalms:

"The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation" (Ex. 34:6--7).

In this short hymn which signs of the character of God there are found four separate expressions for 'mercy' and three words meaning 'sin', which the LORD promises to 'carry' -- in other words, to forgive. The Old Testament emphasises in many different ways Man's 'guilt' before a Holy God, and to refer to this the Hebrew language employs eight separate terms, which are used extensively. Their primal meanings have been studied by Martin Buber, among others: The word *het*, 'crime, offence', may come from the idea of a 'dividing wall', as in the Arabic *hataya /hit*; *pasha*, 'rebellion', comes from the same root as the word for 'step, stride' and is connected with a virtuous walk; *avon* means 'distortion'; *averah* means 'passing over or through'; *avel* comes from the word *ôl* meaning 'yoke'; *resha* expresses 'violent wickedness', *mirmah* 'deception' and 'betrayal', and *âven* 'wrongness', derived from the same root as 'grief'.

The Greek New Testament uses mainly one word for 'sin', *hamartia*, which depicts 'going astray' and 'error'. The Bible takes up the issue of man's sin right from its very first pages. Even the two main Hebrew words for prayer *lehitpallel* and *lehithannen* reflect this thought: the first comes from *plili*, 'guilty', and the second from the word *hanun*, meaning 'gracious' -- and both words are in a grammatical form which illustrates a self-repeating act. In prayer we always confess our sins and give thanks to God that he is gracious.

The OT speaks only a couple of times about the "love" of God. Rather, the love of man for God and for his neighbour is stressed from time to time. The Hebrew term for love, then, refers primarily to human feelings. *When speaking of God the word 'mercy' corresponds to 'love', because we do not deserve the favour of a Holy God. The Greek NT solved the problem by creating a special term agape for the love of God -- the word eros being associated with the sensual life, and phileo, which is also used for 'love', means 'to kiss'.* The hymn of grace heard by Moses depicts this *agape* using four different 'mercy' words, and relates the forgiveness and faithfulness of God to the context of 'mercy': he "abounds in love and faithfulness". For

'faithfulness' the OT uses here the word *emet* or 'truth'. These characteristics are also true of Jesus: "He was full of grace and truth"... "Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:14,17).

A representative of the Helsinki synagogue once complained in a television discussion that the words Moses heard had been translated to sound like they were thoroughly vengeful: "God does not leave unpunished but will avenge!" The Authorised Version is closer to the Hebrew when it says that, "*God will by no means clear the guilty*", and the German Bible states that before him "no man is without guilt". *The original text reads, ve-naqqeh lo ye-naqqeh; behind this lies a root meaning 'cleansing', which is emphasised by the repetition. Accurately translated, this verse reads as "cleaning he will not clean", in other words, he will "leave uncleansed".*

And as for 'vengeance'? Hebrew uses the milder term *poqed avon*, the verbal root form of which means 'counting' and in one of its forms the 'giving of a task'. Modern Hebrew's *paqid* or 'official, functionary' comes from the same root. The English 'reckon with' in the sense of 'take into consideration' is probably closest to the Hebrew. Rather than the vengeful translations of today it would be clearer to stick closely to the original and say that, *God "forgives wickedness, rebellion, and sin, or he leaves them uncleansed, and he reckons with the wickedness of the fathers..."*

The Hebrew Bible uses six main concepts instead of "vengeance or retribution". Their meaning; like "reckon with", "to pay", "restore", "recompense", "to bring up", or "return";⁵⁶ is very mild by nature.

There is also of course the harsh word, *naqam*, 'vengeance', which God uses of himself: "Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord". When Hebrew idiom is given its due respect, 'vengeance' means the justice of God and its natural consequences: "What a man sows, that shall he reap". In the book of Job we read:

"Far be it from God to do evil, from the Almighty to do wrong. He repays a man for what he has done; he brings upon him what his conduct deserves."⁵⁷

The Prophet who will be conceived by the Holy Spirit

We have already seen how the Targum of Jonathan twice mentions that the prophet like Moses will be "conceived by the Holy Spirit". When looking more closely at the background to this thought, the Judaist H.L.Strack comes to mind. In 1911 he initiated a discussion of the so-called Sadducean documents of Damascus, which speak at length of a "teacher of righteousness" and the "Holy Spirit".⁵⁸ In these literary finds -- which actually belong to the same genre as the Dead Sea Scrolls -- there is an account of God concealing himself and rejecting the remnant of Israel: "*And he will raise up to them a Teacher of Righteousness to lead them in the way of their hearts.*" *The Messiah is referred to here by the name 'the Branch': "And he will teach righteousness in the last days". Of him it is said that God will "make his Holy Spirit known to them through his Messiah, and he will be the TRUTH.*" Reference is made four times to the "Messiah of Aaron and Israel". The "Messiah of Aaron" means his priestly role, and the "Messiah of Israel" his kingly state.

The Dead Sea Scrolls contain a section which also brings to mind the above. Speaking of the "Godly men" in the Essene community we read that, "*When God begets the Messiah,*⁵⁹ *with them will come the Priest, head of the whole congregation of Israel and of all the elders of the sons of Aaron... And they will sit before him, each man according to his dignity. And the last to sit will be the Messiah of Israel.*"

*Dr R.Gordis says that if this excerpt is taken seriously it will be "highly important as a source for the concept of a Divinely begotten Messiah".*⁶⁰ The word *yolid* which appears in the text means in its primary sense to 'beget'. The Targum's mention of the prophet who will be raised up through the Holy Spirit has been completely overlooked by critics, although it is more important than the Dead Sea Scroll excerpt in

that it relates directly to the exegesis of the Old Testament. The Targum uses the word *aqim*, 'I will raise up', for the begetting of the prophet like Moses. This is all set in relief by the saying in Psalm 2:7: "You are my son; today I have begotten you". This verse -- which the Rabbis considered a Messianic prophecy -- contains the same term as in the Dead Sea Scrolls for "beget". It was also of central importance in the early church (Acts 13:33, Heb. 1:5 and 5:5)

We have seen that in the light of the old Jewish literature the Messiah is to be a "Second Moses" and the "Last Saviour"; he will be called by the name "Lord"; grace and truth will be united in him; he will be conceived by the Holy Spirit; he will speak and act in the name of God, and that will be his distinguishing "sign"; in this way he will show himself to be Moses "redivivus". All of these features apply to Jesus.

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- [49.](#) David L. Cooper, *The Messiah, His redemptive Career*, p15.
 - [50.](#) In Hebrew, respectively *be-Ruah qudsha* and *de-Ruah qudsha*
 - [51.](#) *Midrash Qoheleth Rabbati* 1.
 - [52.](#) *Mikraoth Gedoloth Bamidbar* 12:8
 - [53.](#) The Jewish prayerbook *Sidûr*, Shakharit 13 ikarim, 3.
 - [54.](#) Masekhet Baba Bathra 75b.
 - [55.](#) Masekhet Baba Bathra 75b.
 - [56.](#) *lifkôd, leshalleh, leshavôth, lehamtsî, lasîm al, lehashîv.*
 - [57.](#) See Galatians 6:7 and Job 34:11.
 - [58.](#) G. Margoliouth, *The Two Zadokite Messiahs*, J.T.S. 1911, pp446-450
 - [59.](#) Here we have the word "beget", *im yolid El eth ha-Mashiah*
 - [60.](#) R. Godis, *The begotten Messiah in the Qumran Scrolls*, Vet. Test. 1957, pp191-194. Fragment I QSa II 1-15.

THE TORAH OF MOSES AND THE MESSIAH

Tradition assigns to the Messiah a threefold role: kingly, priestly, and prophetic. When speaking of Jacob's blessing we also mentioned Judah's "ruler's staff", for which Hebrew uses the word *me .hoqêq*, 'lawgiver'. *In his prophetic role the Messiah will draw up a new Law for the people.*

On the strength of this we must now ask, "What then is the role of the Law? Does it always lead into bondage? Can the Torah liberate man? Were all of Moses' injunctions intended to be eternally binding? Where do we draw the line between the commandments of God and the commandments of men? Could it be that the law of God is centred upon some less common fundamental rules? Does God demand more from his chosen people than from the Gentiles? Does he show favouritism towards some of his children and not to others? Will the Messiah institute a new Torah? Are there essential differences between the Torah of Moses and that of the Messiah? Such questions are tough nuts to crack, particularly for the Jews.

The Messiah's Torah and the future of the Law

The future of the Law has preoccupied the Rabbis from early times. They sometimes asked, '*Torah, whatever will become of you?*'⁶¹ And further, in the Talmud there is a discussion of the possible ranking of the precepts in order of importance:

"Moses was given 613 precepts; of these there are 365 (thou shalt) in accordance with the number of days in the year, and 248 (thou shalt not) according to the number of bones in a man's body... Came David and cut them down to eleven... Came Isaiah and cut them to six... Came Micah and cut them to three... Isaiah came back and cut them down to two... Came Habakkuk and cut them to one, as it is written (Hab. 2:4), 'The righteous shall live by faith'.⁶²

Paul founded his teaching of Justification by Faith partly on these words of Habbakuk when he wrote: "For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith'."⁶³

I remember once in a Jerusalem public park chancing upon an acquaintance of mine, a builder from Yemen, someone I knew as a devout man who possessed an intimate familiarity with the Scriptures. I sat down next to him on the park bench where he was sitting, and in the course of our conversation he told me how he had originally come to Israel by "flying carpet", and how his father had said to him before his departure, "My son, you will never manage to fulfil all the requirements the Law will make of you in Israel. Just remember the words of Habakkuk, that 'the righteous are to live by faith'." My friend was helped by his father's wise counsel to see what is central to the Law.

The ancient Sages reject on the one hand the idea that the injunctions received from their fathers will cease to be valid, yet on the other hand they sometimes stress that the Messiah will give Israel a new Torah. RaMBaM states in the 8th and 9th of his 13 dogmas that the "*Torah which we now have was given to Moses*" and "*This Torah will not be changed nor will the Creator -- may he be blessed -- institute any other Torah*". He nevertheless explains in his work "Ordinances of the Kings" that the King anointed as Messiah will "*sit on his kingly throne and write for himself a Book of the Law in addition to the Law given to our Fathers*" and "*He will compel Israel to obey these commandments*". Not even the NT speaks of the abrogation of the Torah but rather of its "fulfilment". Could this be the same as when the *Pesikhta Rabbati* says that "*The Torah will revert to its original state*"?⁶⁴ Jesus "fulfilled" the punishment of the Law by his atoning death.

According to the Rabbis the Messiah will be invested with such authority. Yalqut Isaiah states that, "*The Holy One -- may he be blessed -- will sit (in the Garden of Eden) and draw up a new Torah for Israel, which will be given to them by the Messiah*".⁶⁵ Even the fearful thought of "abrogation" appears in the traditions of the Wise: "*In the future the commandments will be annulled*".⁶⁶ In the Midrash Mekhilta from the time of the Tannaites -- that is, from the first two Christian centuries -- we find the statement that, "*At the end the Torah will be forgotten*".⁶⁷ R.Shimon Ben Eleazar, who was active from ca. 170--200 AD, declares that, "*This is how it will be in the days of the Messiah; there will be no 'thou shalt' and 'thou shalt not' commandments (zechut ve-hovâh)*".⁶⁸ Klausner, in his book "The Messianic Idea in Israel", explains that, "*The natural interpretation of this is that in the days of the Messiah, the Torah and the Commandments will lose their significance*".⁶⁹

In so far as we understand redemption history as different eras, as we have seen the Sages above doing, we can interpret mentions of the 2000 years of the Torah and the 2000 years associated with the days of the Messiah as more or less mutually exclusive -- which is how Klausner and others have understood it. *In practice this means that in the Messianic age there will be Messianic laws.*

RaMBaM insists upon the natural character of the Messianic age. He writes:

"Do not entertain the idea that the natural course of this world will change in the days of the Messiah, or that the laws of nature will be suspended then. No. The world will follow its own course."⁷⁰

This would seem to imply that the Messianic age will be quite normal history in which the Messiah will govern by his spirit those who believe in him. The Sages could hardly have meant that the Messiah would live for these 2000 years. Isaiah's prophecy about peace on Earth in which even the physical world will be renewed and where "the wolf will live with the lamb" (Is. 11:6) may, according to the Sages, apply to the 1000 year "sabbath". This picture of a sabbatical age, of which we catch glimpses now and then in the Rabbinic literature, brings to mind the vision of the millennial kingdom in Revelation chapter 20, where the phrase "1000 years" appears six times. In Christian understanding, the actual Day of Judgement and the

New Heaven and New Earth do not take place until after this. Could the Talmud be referring to something like this when it says that:

"The Holy One -- blessed be his name -- will not renew his world until 7000 years have elapsed."? ⁷¹
The concept of the 'annulment of the Law', a phrase used by some of the Rabbis, has had serious consequences for both Jews and Christians. Certainly there are differences of emphasis between the teachings of Moses and Christ, but both of them strove to realise the unchanging will of God. The Midrash on Ecclesiastes says that, *'The Torah which man learns in this world is but vanity compared with the teaching of the Messiah.'* ⁷² Referring to Psalm 146:7 the corresponding Midrash says:

"The LORD sets prisoners free'... What does this 'setting free of prisoners' mean? There are those who say that in the future the Holy One will make all unclean animals fit for eating. ⁷³
For 'prisoners' the Hebrew OT uses here the word *asûrîm*, 'forbidden things', rather than the normal word *asirîm*, and this gives rise to a discussion of forbidden foods. We remember how Jesus stresses that "What goes into a man's mouth does not make him 'unclean', but what comes out of his mouth, that is what makes him 'unclean' " and, "In saying this Jesus declared all foods 'clean' " (Matt. 15:11 and Mark 7:19). In actual fact the Old Testament's regulations concerning food do not particularly refer to the pollution of the body, as Lev. 11:43--4 in the original Hebrew regarding the eating of unclean beasts twice declares: *"Do not pollute 'your souls', eth naphshotêchem!" In other words, it is not merely a question of health but also an aesthetic matter.*

The Torah interpreted by the False Messiah Sabbatai Tsvi

In the teaching of the Greek Neo-Platonists body and soul are so distinct from each other that immoral conduct does not necessarily affect the inner man. In its day, this way of thinking crept into both Jewish and Christian circles with the result that Psalm 146, for example, received the interpretation that "The Lord frees us from prohibitions", and so the door was opened to one of religious history's most odious phenomena.

Professor Gershom Scholem, an authority on Jewish mysticism, in his book "The Messianic Idea in Judaism" writes at length about the False Messiah Sabbatai Tsvi. ⁷⁴ The name *Sabbatai* in Hebrew means 'the star Saturnus' -- small wonder that he became a false Messiah, just like Bar Kokhba, the 'son of a star', before him. Balaam, son of Beori, prophesied in his time that, "A star will rise from Jacob and the sceptre will ascend from Israel" referring, in accordance with both Jewish and Christian exegesis, to the Messiah (Num. 24:17). Nevertheless that same Balaam enticed Israel into immorality. More abominable yet, however, was the way in which Sabbatai Tsvi and his compatriot Yankiev Frank were to appear and interpret the Torah.

Only one year after Sabbatai Tsvi had proclaimed himself in Israel to be the Messiah he converted to Islam, forced to do so by the Sultan of Turkey. This was in the year 1666 AD. His followers, however, explained that their master had merely "gone down into the world", *kliṗôt*, ⁷⁵ in order to save those who were in the world. He became "stricken with illness" for our sakes; he had to descend to the level of those who were still ba-Hol, in bondage to the daily round and superficiality, without holiness. In this respect Sabbatai himself explained: "Be blessed, Thou who freest us from prohibitions!" He claimed that the Messiah was to startle those who believed in him by performing "strange works". "The denial of the Law," he proclaimed, "is its fulfilment." His followers too were to descend to "trivialities" and to "open the doors of uncleanness" committing sin so much that it would no longer disturb them. There was nothing forbidden in the "sublime Torah". The word *atsilim* which means literally the 'sublime' or 'noble' ones became the nickname of Shabtai's followers. These believers really had to do quite revolting acts in secret. To illustrate, let the following suffice: In Turkey the 'Atsilim' held special "lights-out rituals" in which they exchanged sexual partners, a custom they had apparently learned from an Islamic sect.

The members of the movement had to swear an oath of secrecy which forbade them to speak to outsiders about their teaching. Only by denying the "Torah of Creation", the laws of society, could they reach the

level of the "sublime Torah". They invented their own Confession of Faith with 13 articles, in which it was explained that the Ten Commandments had been abrogated, but that the ritual law was still to be observed. The Confession ends with the plea that the saviour and Messiah Sabbatai Tsvi will come back "quickly, and in our own day". The closest parallel to the follower of Sabbatai Tsvi is the Nazi Übermensch, the 'superman' who is also above all morality. The "man of lawlessness", the Antichrist, is said to "oppose and exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshipped" (2 Thess. 2:4).

We learn from the Sabbatai Tsvi episode that bare religiosity with no conception of holiness really does open wide the "gates of uncleanness". *We see, however, in this error some aspects of Jewish Messianic expectation, albeit negatively developed.* If we were to compare the Torahs of Jesus and Sabbatai we would first of all notice that Jesus did not come "to abolish the Law but to fulfil it". He prayed for his disciples:

"My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.

They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth" (John 17:15-17).

The followers of Sabbatai were taught to perform obscenities in secret; Jesus taught his disciples to carry out good deeds in secret. Only a good tree can bear good fruit. Jesus even went as far as to give his listeners the challenge "Which of you can prove me guilty of sin?" The Christian is to walk always in the light.

It is true that the whole Jewish exposition of the Torah is intended as a private matter for Israel alone. The Sages frequently repeat that *"The Torah was intended only for those who ate manna in the wilderness"*. The Jewish understanding of the Torah can be depicted as a series of concentric circles: the innermost rings are the Ten Commandments; then come the 613 precepts -- the *taryag*; next come the ancillary rules, the *seyag* or 'hedge' around the Law; In addition to all this the 'Law' signifies the teachings of the Pentateuch and also the exposition given to it by both the Talmudic and the Mediaeval scholars. The word 'Torah', however, means only 'teaching', even though the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the OT made ca. 200 BC, translated the Hebrew by the word *nomos*, 'law'. Frequently we come across the distinction drawn between the Written and the Oral Law. The scholars themselves do not always consider it necessary to explain the different aspects of the Law because like Paul they are addressing "those who know the Law" (Rom. 7:1). However, in the context of the Messianic Idea the Torah receives a universal significance, made clear by the Prophet Isaiah: "The Law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem".⁷⁶

The basis of Paul's interpretation of the Torah

Paul's interpretation of the Torah arose from the awareness that the teachings of Christ were meant for all nations. In this way he was forced to take a stand as to what were mere 'commandments of men' in the Jewish exposition of the Torah. As a profound authority on his own tradition he recognised that the Messiah had the right to give 'a new interpretation to the Law' and even to tear down the 'hedge'. In the Christian camp the claim is sometimes made that Paul's logic is "capricious", internally "inconsistent", and "vacillating".⁷⁷ The Jewish camp, for its part, reckons that Paul's attitude to the Torah was "completely negative".⁷⁸

One factor which contributes to this Jewish misunderstanding of Paul is the way Rom. 10:4 has been translated into many western languages as "Christ is the end of the Law!"⁷⁹ However, the Greek word translated as 'end', *telos*, means primarily 'goal', as in "The end justifies the means". This same word *telos* is found in 1.Tim. 1:5, which in the NIV is translated as "The goal of this command is love!". Jesus made this point perfectly clear in the Sermon on the Mount when he said: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them" (Matt. 5:17). In this spirit it would be better to translate the verse in Romans regarding Christ that he is the 'goal' of the Law. There is nothing negative in that.

What then is the logic of Paul's interpretation of the Law, and how does his scholarly exposition square up with the teachings of the Old Testament and with the points brought out by the earliest Jewish Messianic Expectation? For the sake of clarity it may be best to divide the answer into a number of basic points.

1. *Firstly, we must see that the Bible depicts God as holy and that he demands holiness.* Moses on several occasions received the words "Be holy, because I, the LORD your God, am holy" (Lev. 11:44, 19:2, 20:26). Therefore Paul too wrote:

"The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men... There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil; first for the Jew, and then for the Gentile" (Rom. 1:18 and 2:9).

When a certain pastor once expressed the wish that young people might be burdened with a guilty conscience until the problem of their sin was dealt with, people took offence at him. Nevertheless, he spoke just as Paul had done:

"So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good" (Rom. 7:12). "We know that the Law is good if a man uses it properly" (1 Tim. 1:8).

The Law is also "spiritual" (Rom. 7:14). When God through his Holy Spirit reveals to us our sin, we are forced to say with Paul: "I *know* that nothing good lives in me"; "So I *find* this law at work: when I want to do good, evil is right there with me"; "I *see* another law at work in my members... making me a prisoner" (Rom. 7:18,21,23). *Only the person whom God has his hand upon "knows, finds, and sees" his true state.* This is also brought about by the Law, which was given "so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God" (Rom. 3:19). "So the Law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith" (Gal. 3:24). Here we see the logic of Paul's interpretation of the Law, which every believer inevitably experiences as real.

Modern Judaism's understanding of Man is quite different from that found in the New Testament. The devout Jew reads every morning in his prayer book, *Sidûr*, the words: "*My God, the soul which thou hast given me is pure.*" Israel's most popular TV Rabbi once stated in his Sabbath morning service that, "*In us there is more light than dark, more goodness than bad -- the Christians teach otherwise*". And indeed: Jesus taught that "From within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, murder, adultery", the whole gamut of our sinfulness (Matt. 15:11 and Mark 7:21--22). Man is utterly corrupted by inherited sin. That is why he needs forgiveness and atonement for sin. Judaism generally rejects the idea of original sin and claims that the demands of God are not disproportionate. Hence the above-mentioned morning prayer asks:

"Do not let the evil inclination (Heb. *yetser ha-Râ*) rule over us. Deliver us from evil men and evil companions and let us be joined to good inclinations."

In other words, evil lies in wait for Man as if it were external to him. Gen. 6, however, contains an account of the generation of Noah which uses just that word *yetser*: "The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every *inclination* of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time". And Proverbs 20:9 asks: "Who can say, 'I have kept my heart pure; I am clean and without sin?'" It is none other than the holiness of God which leads to the conviction of sin and ultimately to genuine repentance.

2. *Secondly, the will of God is manifestly much simpler than the hundreds of ritual and human commandments created by Jewish tradition.* Furthermore, differentiating between the true manna eaters and the Gentiles in their relationship to God results in spiritual discrimination. The prophet Amos cried out: "'Are not you Israelites the same to me as the Cushites?'" declares the LORD... Surely the eyes of the Sovereign LORD are on the sinful kingdom" (Amos 9:7--8).

We have already seen the discussion in the Talmud about the possible reduction of the Torah's 613 precepts to one, "And the righteous will live by faith". Even Moses hinted at the simple, fundamental intent of the Law in Deut. 10:12:

"And now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul."

The prophet Micah also emphasised the simplicity of the relationship with God:

"He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Mic. 6:8).

Jesus himself showed that the most important things in the Law are "*justice, mercy and faithfulness*" (Matt. 23:23). Might also Moses have been aware of the human tendency to create human laws, since he twice stressed when giving the Law, "Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it" (Deut. 4:2 and 12:32)?

The prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah feared that *the commandments of men might become a substitute for the true word of consolation or some kind of false refuge*. Rather than the "rule upon rule" attitude "God said, 'This is the resting place, let the weary rest,' and 'This is the place of repose.' " But now instead they "will go and fall backwards and be crushed under their burdens" and they will be "snared and captured". They do indeed approach God "with their lips", but their "hearts" are far from him, "because their worship for God is made up only of rules taught by men". But God will yet have it that the "wisdom of the wise will perish, the intelligence of the intelligent will vanish". Paul too quoted these harsh words of Isaiah.⁸⁰

In the same way the Old Testament's weeping prophet, Jeremiah, who was active before the destruction of the first temple (586 BC), complains that the people trust in an external form of worship, whilst otherwise following "the stubborn inclinations of their evil hearts": "Do not trust in deceptive words and say, 'This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD!' " Or, "How can you say 'We are wise, for we have the law of the LORD,' when actually the lying pen of the scribes has handled it falsely?... they have rejected the word of the LORD." The people place their trust in circumcision although "the whole house of Israel is uncircumcised in heart".⁸¹

These prophetic rebukes apply equally to every age. *How easily a learned religious tradition can become more important than the personal obedience of faith*. The Christian too might say, "We have the church, we have the true teaching and we have baptism" -- and done in the right way too! Three times Paul employs the same formula: "Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing" as such, but rather a) "the keeping of God's commandments" b) "faith expressing itself through love" and c) "the new creation".⁸² Paul did not disparage circumcision, but he wanted to get matters into their proper perspective. Following the same Pauline framework it could be said that "child baptism is nothing and adult baptism is nothing", rather a life lived in accordance with the will of God, faith expressing itself through love, and the renewal of the mind available to us in Christ -- and yet through baptism we are united with the death and atoning work of Christ. Personally, baptism has always for me been something very precious, especially so for one who has buried his only son as a fully fledged disciple of Christ in the soil of Israel. Paul was perfectly consistent in applying his Christ-centred thinking to every area of the Christian life.

3. *For Paul the Law was not an end in itself but a "schoolmaster" (AV) to lead us to Christ*. The Law shows a man his true spiritual state and in this way gives him a longing for conciliation. Christ is the goal of the Law. He is the end of the legalistic, formal relationship with God and the beginning of a new personal relationship. As the Messiah, Christ has the right to give the Law "new grounds of interpretation", through which the Torah will "revert to its original state". However, the Messianic tiquin, the healing of humanity's "sin impediment", means that Christ will atone for our sins. In this way he "fulfilled the Law" on our behalf.

Paul speaks of Christ as the goal of the Law "so that there might be righteousness". He bases this on the words of Deut. chapter 30, which are familiar to every devout Jew, and *in which is also found the germ of*

the vicarious atonement idea. Christ is for him "the end of the Law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes".

"Moses," he continues, "describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: 'The man who does these things will live by them'. But the righteousness that is by faith says: 'Do not say in your heart, "Who will ascend into heaven?" " that is, to bring Christ down, or "'Who will descend into the deep?' " that is, to bring Christ up from the dead. But what does it say? 'The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart', that is, the word of faith which we are proclaiming." (Rom.10:6-8)

Along with the verse which Paul quotes, the Hebrew text in Deut. 30:12--13 states twice the words "*yaaleh lanu*" and "*yered lanu*", "for us" or "*on our behalf*", "*pro nobis*"! They stress the fact that, "There is no need for you to say 'Who will go up on our behalf into heaven to fetch it for us and to proclaim it to us, that we might fulfil its requirements?' It's not beyond the seas, so you have no need to say 'Who will cross the ocean on our behalf to fetch it for us and to proclaim it to us that we might fulfil its requirements?' "

The logic behind these verses, in which we find a nascent OT doctrine of redemption, is that a) in the old covenant the Law was proclaimed to men so that they would fulfil its requirements, but now b) in the new covenant Christ has satisfied all the Law's demands by going *on our behalf* down into the deep and rising up to heaven, and we proclaim this completed act. Humanity was unable to carry out God's holy will, deserving only punishment, but now Christ has atoned for our sins, and justification is connected with the forgiveness of sins.

The best definition of justification is found in Isaiah 53:11 where it is said of Christ that, "my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities". Luther's Catechism defines justification with the words: "When in faith we receive Christ our redeemer, God does not hold our sins against us but forgives them for Christ's sake. He imputes Christ's purity and holiness to us. In this way God justifies us." *Luther used his favourite expression opus alienum, 'a deed done by someone else', to describe this: another has satisfied the demands of the Law, another has suffered for our sins, another has borne our iniquities. This is all brought out by the OT's pro nobis phrase, so dear to Paul.*

4. *Nevertheless, this Messianic role includes Paul's description of Christ's "ascending" and "descending", (Grk. anabesetai and katabesetai.) This was also appealed to by Sabbatai Tsvi, even though he forced it to support his "strange deeds" and denial of the Law. Precisely this kind of common derivation attests to the genuineness of the ideas. Even if such thoughts are utterly foreign to the modern reader we cannot set new conditions to the grounds of the Messianic expectation. Paul says in Ephesians:*

"What does 'he ascended' mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, *in order to fill all things*" (grk. *'ta panta'*, everything) (4:9--10).

Peter understood this mystery to be that Christ "also went and preached to the spirits in prison"... "For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead" (1. Pet. 3:19 and 4:6). The Apostles' creed concurs with this when it affirms that Jesus "descended into Hades".

The Jerusalem Targum says in connection with Deut. ch 30:

"O, would that we had a prophet such as Moses who would ascend into heaven and give us the Torah and proclaim to us its demands!"

Verse 4 chapter 30 promises that God will gather the banished of Israel, even though they be in "the most distant land under the heavens". Targum Jonathan explains that *this will happen "through the efforts of the High Priest Elias, and he will retrieve them from there through the Messiah-King."* Midrash Rabbah rejects the idea that there will come "a second Moses with another Torah from heaven". Could this be a reaction against the early Christian church seeing in Christ the promised prophet who would be like Moses!

In the context of the Bronze Serpent we discussed *the description in the Wisdom of Solomon of the "sign of salvation", and the passage we quoted terminated with the words: "You lead men down to the gates of Hades and back again"*. Proverbs 30:4 asks: "Who has gone up to heaven and come down? Who has gathered up the wind in the hollow of his hands?... Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is his name, and the name of his son? Tell me if you know!" Thus the 'ascending and descending' idea is prominent even here in this passage, which speaks of the act of creation and of the Son of God.

This humiliation and exaltation is most beautifully expressed by Paul in his hymn found in the letter to the Philippians:

"Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death -- even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:5--11)

5. *In the synagogues of ancient times the Ten Commandments were read every Sabbath as a kind of foundation to the faith. In ca. 90 AD, however, the Great Council of Jamnia decided to abandon the practice.* According to the Talmud someone might mistakenly assume that God gave only these 10 precepts on Sinai. The same council caused the use of the "translation of the Seventy", the Septuagint, to cease as the synagogue's official source, because the early Christians relied on it rather than on the Hebrew original to prove Jesus as the Messiah. For the same reason even the emphasis on belief in the resurrection was toned down considerably. We have seen how the Sabbatai Tsvi movement rejected the Ten Commandments, otherwise accepting the Jewish ritual law.

The decisions made at Jamnia were of momentous consequence for the whole subsequent development of Judaism. It thus became more and more a religion of law, and the minutiae of Pharisaic Torah exegesis began to monopolise the position of authority at the expense of the other streams of Jewish thought. Paul, who tells us about himself that he was a member of the strictest sect of the Pharisees, saw this danger. He writes:

"But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code" (Rom. 7:6).

Originally God justified Abraham on the grounds of his faith. Legal ordinances given some 430 years later to Moses cannot annul this "covenant previously established by God" (Gal. 3:16--19). To this day, Christ as the Messiah still has the answer to the Jewish Torah problem.

The "hedge" around the Law with its traditions and ordinances of men has now been torn down. The Ten Commandments are of course still valid as the irrevocable "words of the Covenant". The Christian's protective "hedge" is Christ himself, and so Paul in his letters uses over 160 times the phrase "to be in Christ". If we stray out of Christ, the "dogs of the Law," to use Luther's words will tear us to pieces. In this way the law serves the gospel. Here lay the background and logic of Paul's Torah teaching.

The strongest testimony against the addition of further human ordinances is however to be found in Moses' own statement in Deut. 5:23 as he gave the Law: *"These are the commandments the LORD proclaimed... and he added nothing more!"* In this way these "words of the Covenant", the Ten Commandments, are sufficient as the expression of the holy will of God. These commandments were not abolished at Calvary.

[61.](#) *Nazîr* 50.

[62.](#) *Makkoth* 23-24.

63. See Rom. 1:17, Gal. 3:11 and Hebr. 10:38.
 64. *Pesikhta Rabbati* 89,6.
 65. *Yalqut Isaiah* 26, siman 296.
 66. *Nida* 66b.
 67. *Mechilta, Masechet Piska*, 2.
 68. *Shabbath* 130a-b.
 69. J. Klausner, *Ha-ra'ayon ha-meshihi be-Israel*, p289.
 70. *Hilchoth melachim* 12,1
 71. *Sanhedrin* 96b.
 72. *Midrash Qoheleth* 71,8.
 73. *Midrash Tehilim* 146,7.
 74. Gershom Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, New York 1974, pp49-175.
 75. The word *klipôth* comes from *klipâh*, 'shell', and means anything superficial, shallow.
 76. See Is. 2:1-3, Micah 4:1 and zech. 8:20-23
 77. Eg. E.P. Sanders and Heikki Räisänen in their books.
 78. Eg. Joseph Klausner, *The messianic Idea in Israel*, (Hebr.) p287.
 79. Des Gesetzes Ende, etc.
 80. Is. 28:10-13 and 29:13-14. Also 1 Cor. 1:19.
 81. Jer. 7:4, 8:8 and 9:24-26
 82. 1 Cor. 7:19, Gal. 5:6 and 6:15

THE MESSIAH, PRINCE OF THE COUNTENANCE

The Rabbinic Messianic discussions may to us often sound capricious and irrational. Cryptic Messianic references are made in passing in the Talmudic and Midrashic literature, but probably most of all in the *Zohar*, a mystical commentary on the Pentateuch. The New Testament's portrait of Christ too contains aspects which are inexplicable from the historico-prophetic point of view alone. Indeed Paul speaks of the mystery of Christ "which has been kept hidden for ages and generations" and "hidden for long ages past" (Col. 1:26, 1.Cor. 2:7, and Rom. 16:25). According to Peter he was "chosen before the creation of the world" (1.Pet. 1:20).

Jacob sees the face of God

One of the most detached Messianically interpreted illustrations in the Pentateuch concerns an incident in the life of Jacob. There is, relatively speaking, so little said about it in the old literature that we present it only now, out of chronological order. In Gen. ch. 32 we read of how Jacob wrestled by the Jabbok stream with a certain "man", from whom he asked his blessing. Jacob received the new name *Israel*, which means 'he struggles with God', since he had "struggled with God and with men" and won. Jacob gave the place the name *Peniel*, meaning 'face of God', and he said "I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been spared". The two names *Peniel* and *Penuel* are used of this mysterious nocturnal apparition (Gen. 32:29--30). Midrash Rabbah commenting on this says that *Jacob "saw the face of God in the Holy Spirit"* (lit. 'in the *Shechina*').

The account of Jacob's wrestling with the angel gave rise among the Sages to thoughts which have a direct bearing on their understanding of the Messiah. *Targum Onqelos states that actually Jacob saw the "Angel of the LORD"*. But who is this "Angel of the LORD" and who is "Penuel"? Isaiah 63:9 presents a mystical enigma, which in a certain way is connected with the Jabbok river account. Isaiah says:

"In all their distress he too was distressed, and the angel of his presence [Heb. 'countenance'] saved them. In his love and mercy he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old."

The Rabbis say that this "angel of his presence" means the "Angel of the Covenant and the Prince of the Countenance". In Hebrew the phrase is *Sar ha-Panim*, literally 'the Prince of the faces' or 'countenance'. Rabbi David Qimhi says of Mal. 3:1, the Lord who will "suddenly come to his temple", that "this Lord is the Messiah-King, and he is the Lord of the Covenant".⁸³ This being so, we can conclude that Jacob had a Messianic experience, in that he beheld the face of the Messiah.

Christ as the 'Prince of the Countenance'

The Jewish prayerbook, the *Sidûr ha-Shalem*, contains, in the New Year prayers in connection with the sounding of the *shofar* horn, a remarkable prayer which speaks of "Jesus, the Prince of the Countenance". I know of two separate occasions where, concerning this prayer, some young men on asking who this Jesus actually is have been driven out of the Synagogue. The prayer reads:

"May it be Thy will that the blast from this horn should carry to the tabernacle of God by the instrumentality of our delegate Tartiel, whose name Elias -- may his memory be blessed -- has given to him, and through Jesus the Prince of the Countenance and the Prince Metatron, and may grace be our part. Be Thou blessed, Lord of grace."

The name 'Jesus' appears in this prayer in its proper Hebrew form *Jeshûa*, which means 'saviour'.

We can observe here that the *Sidûr* identifies the "delegate Tartiel", "Jesus the Prince of the Countenance", and "Metatron" with each other. The origin of the name *Tartiel* is not known, but one conjecture suggests that it is derived from the words *tartei El*, or "God's other form" in which he reveals himself -- even though when it is changed into a name the letter *taw* is changed into the "other T" of the Hebrew alphabet, *tet*. The strange name 'Metatron' comes from the Greek *meta thronon*, that is, 'the one who sits on the throne'. Targum Jonathan, on Gen. 5:24 in which we read of the translation of Enoch (how he walked with God and then "was no more"), says that "He ascended to heaven and God called him by the name Metatron, the Great Scribe".

Stockholm's erstwhile chief Rabbi, Professor Gottlieb Klein, in a work published in 1898, sets forth Metatron's main features as portrayed in the Jewish literature:

"Metatron is the nearest person to God, serving him; on the one hand his confident and delegate, on the other hand the representative of Israel before God... Metatron is also known as *Sar ha-Panîm*, the 'Prince of the Countenance' or just as 'the Prince', and he sits in God's innermost chamber (*penim*). The numeric value of 'Metatron' is the same as that of *Shaddai*, 'the Almighty'. He is therefore the delegate of the Almighty. *Shaddai* (10+4+300) = 314 and Metatron (50+6+200+9+9+40) = 314."

Professor Klein also writes at length about how it would appear that in Judaism *Metatron is often identified with the Word or Logos, and he shows that there are five such intermediaries in the Talmud: "1. Metatron, 2. The Word of Yahweh, Mimra, 3. God's hovering glory, the Shechina, 4. God's Holy Spirit, Rûah ha-Qôdesh, and 5. the Voice from Heaven, Bath Qôl.(lit. 'daughter of a voice')"*⁸⁴

Metatron functions primarily as a *prayer intercessor*. The Talmud says that the angels understand only Hebrew.⁸⁵ Only Metatron, the defender of Israel, may approach the throne of God, when he enters Israel's good deeds into the accounts.⁸⁶ When Israel's Ark of the Covenant was being built the angels received the commission to build in Heaven an abode for "the youth whose name is Metatron, in which dwelling he will bring the souls of the Just to God to atone for Israel during the Captivity".⁸⁷ This 'atonement' idea appears in the supplement to the *Sidûr* prayerbook, where it is said that in this way the blast from the horn and the prayers rise "before the throne and speak on our behalf, atoning for all our sins".

The most important points of contact which this cryptic name created by the Rabbis has are, however, with the "angel of the covenant" and the "angel of the LORD". In Judges ch. 6 there is an account of how the angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon. We read that "The LORD turned to him and said," and "The LORD answered him," identifying the angel with "the LORD". Gideon exclaims, "Ah, Sovereign LORD! I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face!" (vv 14,16 and 22). But what, in the opinion of the Rabbis, is so exceptional in this angel of the LORD?

When the most famous Rabbi of the Middle Ages RaSHI considered this issue he referred to the words of Exodus 23:20--21:

"See, I am sending an angel ahead of you to guard you along the way... Pay attention to him and listen to what he says. Do not rebel against him... *since my name is in him.*"

RaSHI suggests that the words at the end of the verse " '*my name is in him*' mean 'He and I have the same name.' "

"And our Rabbis have said," he continues, "that this is Metatron, whose name is the same as the name of the LORD. The numeric value of 'Metatron' corresponds to that of 'Shaddai', the name of the Almighty."

It was of him Moses was speaking when he said, in Ex. 33:15: "If *your presence* (Heb.'face') does not go with us do not send us up from here." *RaMBaN sees here and in the preceding verses Metatron and the angel of the covenant.* Small wonder that *as early as the Talmud we find the simple statement that Metatron is also the Prince of the Countenance.*⁸⁸

Such discussions lead us to strange territories indeed, but they illustrate the often irrational roots of Messianism. Christ is God's "other mode of manifesting himself"; he sits "upon the throne" and acts as our advocate; he is indeed Lord, and God's "name is in him"; in Christ we see the face of God.

The Messiah, the Mimra or 'Word' of God

When looking at the Proto-Evangel we saw how the serpent of bronze which Moses raised up in the wilderness was, according to the Wisdom of Solomon, a "sign of salvation". The Targum of Jonathan Ben Uzziel says here that "*He who turns his heart to the LORD's Mimra will be spared*". Professor Gottlieb Klein identified Metatron, used as an epithet for the Messiah, with Yahweh's *Mimra* or 'Word'. *In Klein's opinion it was precisely this Aramaic word which gave the grounds to the belief that Christ is "the Word or Logos of God become flesh"*.

*The Jewish philosopher Philo, who lived about the same time as Jesus, considered the Logos to be God's delegate, his emissary and angel who "prays as High Priest before God on behalf of the world".*⁸⁹ *The Mimra concept associated with God and his manifestations appears 596 times in the Targums -- but not once in the Talmud.*⁹⁰ Targum Onqelos uses the word 179 times, Targum Yerushalmi 99 times, and Targum Jonathan 321 times. Over half of these references to the Mimra approach it as if it were "personified".⁹¹ *The absence of 'Mimra' from the Talmud may be a reaction to the first Christians' interpretation of it as indicating Jesus.* But are there really grounds for understanding 'Mimra' to mean the same as the New Testament's 'Logos'?

In answering this question there is good reason to appeal to the Rabbis' way of grading the old writings according to their source value: *"The Old Testament leads to the Targums, the Targums lead to the Mishna, the Mishna to the Talmud, and so on."*⁹² Proceeding in this way the Targums give earlier information on the Rabbis' exegesis than even the Mishna, the oldest part of the Talmud. Therefore, from the point of view of our subject, it is worthwhile familiarising ourselves with these roots of our Christian faith which are concealed in the Targums.

The Mimra appears in the Targums in the following contexts, among others: On the creation of man in Gen.1:27 the Targum says: "And the LORD's Mimra created man" (Targum Yerushalmi); In Gen. 16:13 *Hagar speaks with the "angel of the LORD" and "calls him the LORD's Mimra"* (Yer.); In Gen.'22, where *Abraham speaks with the angel of the LORD, who is given the name "the LORD's Mimra"*, and in v.8 *"The LORD's Mimra himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering"* (Yer.); In Gen. 28:20 Jacob makes a vow and says, *"If the LORD's Mimra will be with me... then the LORD's Mimra will be my God"* (Onqelos); Gen. 15:6 is interpreted by the Targum as follows: *"Abraham believed in the LORD's Mimra, and it was credited to him as righteousness"* (Onq.); Along with the giving of the Law in Ex. 20:1 the Targum reads, *"And the LORD's Mimra spoke all these words"* (Yer.); In Num. 10:35 Moses prays, *"Rise up, O LORD!... Rise up, O Mimra of the LORD!... Return, O Mimra of the LORD!"* (Yer.); When in Ex. 14:31 we are told that the people believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses, the Targum reads this as *"they believed in the LORD's Mimra and in the prophecy of his servant Moses"* (Onq.); The beginning of Deut. chap. 28 stresses that if Israel will obey the voice of God, all the blessings spoken of will come upon them, which is interpreted by the Targum as: *"If you will accept the LORD's Mimra so that the LORD's Mimra will be your God"*, then all this will be fulfilled (Onq.); Isaiah 45:17 and 25 says that *"Israel will be saved by the LORD with an everlasting salvation"* and *"In the LORD all the descendants of Israel will be found righteous"*. The Targum interprets this as, *"Israel will be saved by the LORD's Mimra"* and *"Through the instrumentality of the LORD's Mimra they will be made righteous"* (Jonathan); Hosea 1:7 promises: *"Yet I will show love to the house of Judah, and I will save them"* -- the Targum says: *"Yet I will show love to the house of Judah, and I will save them by their God, the LORD's Mimra"* (Jon.); And also Deut. 33:27, *"The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms"*, is interpreted by the Targum as, *"these arms are the Mimra, through whom the world was created"* (Onq.).

Of special note in these passages from the Targums is that often the Mimra seems to be identified with the name of God: *"The LORD's Mimra will be my God"*; *"I will save them through their God, the LORD's Mimra"*; Abraham was justified through the Mimra; the Mimra gave Israel the Law; Moses prayed to the Mimra; Israel was justified through the Mimra's instrumentality and the Mimra even created the world. If these ideas are joined to the Messianic expectation, a connection the Rabbis made, they will receive a new significance for Christians too.

Although consideration of the Greek *logos* concept will be left for the New Testament section on the opening verses of John's gospel, it is worth noting even at this point that *a similar 'word' theology as that found in connection with the Mimra was in part current among the Essenes of Qumran a little before the birth of Christ*. These sectarians, for the most part former Temple priests, stress in their scrolls that *everything received its beginning through God's deliberate purposing, and "without him nothing was made"* -- *"Through your word everything received its beginning, and without you nothing was made"*.⁹³ The same formula is repeated to this day when a devout Jew blesses a drink taken separately from an actual meal. He recites a prayer taken from the Talmud: *"Blessed be thou, King of the world: everything was made by his word"* (*ha-Kôl nihyâh bi-Dvarô*).

The Jewish professor Gottlieb Klein was aware that certain Christians saw "Metatron, Mimra, the First Man (*adam ha-Qadmôn*), and the second Moses" as related to Christological thinking.⁹⁴ The Talmud says that the name Metatron is equivalent to 'LORD', and he sits in the Holiest of Holies and acts as God's emissary.⁹⁵ He is called the "Angel of the LORD", "The Prince of the Universe", "The Prince of the Countenance" and even by the name "Shechina" - the Presence of God.⁹⁶ The Zohar tradition, which concentrates in its thousands of pages on describing God's essential nature, gathers these scattered fragments together and says:

"Metatron is the angel called the 'Prince of the Countenance', the 'Prince of the Torah', the 'Prince of Power', the 'Prince of Glory', the 'Prince of the Sanctuary', the 'Prince of Angels', the 'Prince of Kings'(Judges 5:3), and the 'Prince of Princes'.⁹⁷

Israel is to present all its prayers in the name of this Prince of the Countenance. It may further be mentioned that the Hebrew word for 'angel' means 'emissary' and not necessarily always merely 'angel'.

The archaeologist and authority on the Dead Sea Scrolls, the late professor Yigael Yadin, who died in the Spring of 1984, drew the attention of the scholarly world to the fact that the New Testament's Letter to the Hebrews speaks about the angelic world in the same way as the Essenes of Qumran. He says:

"The Letter to the Hebrews is one of the most interesting letters in the NT and differs in its contents from all the other early Christian writings which the NT comprises."

In his opinion the writer wishes to witness to Christ. "As the main theme goes: 'He is as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs' " (1:4). "This letter wishes to say," he continues, "that Jesus is an anointed priest, a priest who is not of the seed of Aaron, but of a far nobler descent." The writer speaks "powerful words of rebuke" to his readers and centres his message around the being of Christ, demonstrating that he is the promised High Priest. Yadin thinks that the letter was addressed to the Essenes:

"Indeed, the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews could hardly have chosen examples closer to his audience's hearts, an audience which, according to my thesis, was identical with the Dead Sea sect."⁹⁸

The beginning of Hebrews describes Christ as the Son of God, "through whom he made the universe." Christ is also "the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word". These thoughts too rise from Jewish modes of thinking and are connected with the Mimra theology, with Christ as the Word of God become flesh.

The message of spiritual counsel associated with Penuel

The story of Jacob also has a profound therapeutic word for us. Doctor Frank Lake has written a significant psychiatric study, "Clinical Theology".⁹⁹ In this he describes modern man's internal conflicts and distress, comparing them with Jacob's struggle with Penuel; we must find peace in our dealings with others and in our relationship with God. In these struggles we long to see the face of God, and just like Jacob we demand, "I will not let you go until you bless me!" We are unable to be healed internally until we have found the face of the God who is Love.

Frank Lake may well be exaggerating a little when he says that even the experience of being in the mother's womb before birth and then the trauma of birth itself both have their effects upon the child's life. These factors should not, at any rate, be ignored. However, the child's first year of life is probably the most important for his future development. If the little one does not find the loving and stimulating faces of his parents his world may become dead and barren. If there is no love in the home and if the child is given no attention his life will remain cold and meaningless. The emptiness of home may be reflected in an inner vacuity and even in a condition of anguish. "Lively faces" give rise to a zest for life, unresponsive faces only depression.

But what will happen if the child receives a deep hurt in the early stages of his development? Is he predestined to unhappiness? Will he be forced, as Jacob was, to flee from his childhood? Where will he get the support for the development of his character that he has always lacked? It is in just this kind of situation that a glimpse of the loving face of God can heal our untended wounds. The Holy Spirit glorifies Christ. Among Jesus' parting words were those addressed to Philip: "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). He further promised that, "Every one who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life" (John 6:40). The lives of many young alcoholics and drug addicts have been changed in an instant on their coming face to face with Christ. There are no demands in his love, nothing is forced upon you, and so the experience of seeing his face initiates our inner healing. The psychiatrist K.G. Jung stated on several occasions that *every 35 year old person's anguish "includes a religious factor which requires*

treatment". And only those of his extensive clientÉle who had experienced some kind of spiritual revival "remained permanently well". From this he may have concluded that a healthy religious awakening greatly helps inner healing.

Before his experience by the Jabbok river Jacob thought that he could flee from his problems. In his childhood he found that his father Isaac "loved Esau but Rebekah loved Jacob" (Gen. 25:28). This developed into the crisis of his life. He became a "quiet man who stayed at home" -- the Hebrew uses the phrase *yoshêv ohâlîm*, he 'sat in the tents'. Thus Jacob was left to grow up more or less "with the women". However, he longed for his father's approval and this led him to cheat his brother out of his birthright and steal his father's blessing. Only after 20 years as a refugee, during which time he tasted the hard side of life and the deception of his father-in-law Laban, was he ready to face up to himself, his brother, and his God. Esau was indeed full of murderous intentions when he came to meet him, but when he saw his brother, "he embraced him, threw his arms around his neck and kissed him; and they wept!" (Gen. 33:4) In an instant, years of pent-up anger and bitterness melted into harmony. Jacob had also longed for God's forgiveness and blessing. All this he received by the Jabbok stream.

The Jacob who underwent a crisis of faith received a new name. Penuel said to him:

"Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome" (32:28).

The secondary meaning of 'deception' in the name Jacob was now removed and he became "God's fighter". He was struck where he had become most hardened -- indeed in the thigh! -- so that outwardly he began to limp from that day on, but inwardly he was made whole. We read that when Jacob prayed beside the Jabbok stream he said:

"I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant."

In Hebrew the word for 'unworthy' is *qatonî*, literally 'I have shrunk'! Jacob had been humiliated and made to look small in his own eyes, and that is precisely what freed him to the extent that he stopped running away from himself and what he had done. Now he became a "fighter" and achieved real manhood. We experience something similar when we encounter in Christ the face of the God who is Love.

The Aaronic Blessing, where it speaks of the face of God, also contains this same message of spiritual healing:

"The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace" (Num. 6:24--6).

Not long ago a small talisman was found in Israel dating from the seventh century before Christ. Only when it was studied under a microscope did it reveal the word 'LORD' written three times in tiny old Hebrew characters, which proved to be the Aaronic blessing. This blessing may be understood as concealing a Messianic motif. This is suggested by the Bible's own statement: "So they will put my NAME on the Israelites" (v27), in other words the name 'Yahweh', which for some Rabbis is a cryptic name for the Messiah, as we saw earlier. Targum Onqelos says about the face "shining": "*The LORD make his Holy Spirit (lit. 'Shechina') to shine upon you!*" Indeed: only the presence of God and his Holy Spirit can enlighten and heal our wounded hearts!

[83.](#) Mikraoth Gedoloth, Mal.3:1.

[84.](#) Gottlieb Klein, *Bidrag till Israels religionshistoria*, p89.

[85.](#) *Shabbath* 12b.

[86.](#) *Pesikhta* 57a and *Bamidar Rabbah* c 21.

[87.](#) *Bamidar Rabbah*, par. nassa 12.

[88.](#) *Hagigah* 13.

[89.](#) Gottlieb Klein's *Sex föredrag*, p88.

[90.](#) Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah I*, pp46-48.

91. Ibid vol II pp659-664.
 92. *Sifrei Shoftim*, piska 160a.
 93. Eg. *Megilath ha-serachim* 1 QS XI,10 and Hôdayôth 1 QH I, 19.
 94. Gottlieb Klein's *Sex föredrag*, p95.
 95. *Sanhedrin* 38b, *Hagigah* 15a and *Avoda Zara* 3b.
 96. *Tos. le-Hulin* 60a and *Yebamoth* 16b.
 97. The Zohar gives this prescription in the name of R. Aqiba.
 98. The Hebrew book *Studies on the Dead Sea Scrolls*, Heichal Ha-Sepher publication, pp191-208
 99. Frank Lake, *Clinical Theology*.
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THE TIME OF CHRIST'S COMING

A Jewish friend of mine once asked what would be the best proof of Jesus' Messiahship. Together we came to the conclusion that first of all we ought to decide whether the Messiah was to come at a certain time and whether this time was already past. Secondly, with this in mind, we ought to ask if Judaism could propose any other Messiah candidate with credentials as good as those of Jesus.

There are a couple of prophecies in the Pentateuch which raise questions about the time of the Messiah's coming. Daniel's vision of the "anointed prince" who was to come is part of the same theme. The Rabbis' discussions of these matters can also help Christians to understand the roots of their faith.

The Christ seen from afar

We have already seen that even critical biblical exegesis understands the passage known as Balaam's Blessing as foreshadowing the Messianic age. Numbers 24:13 contains an account of Balaam the son of Beor, who said, "What the LORD says, that must I say too". He presented himself as a man "whose eye sees clearly" and "who hears the words of God, who has knowledge from the Most High". "Come, I will let you know," he continues "what this people will do to your people *in the latter days*... I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near: a star shall come forth out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel."

This prophecy concerns the "latter days", a concept which among the Rabbis points to the Messianic future. Here, just as with Jacob's blessing, the Ruler who is to come will have the "sceptre" in his hand. The words of Ezekiel 21:27 also apply to both blessings:

"It will not be as it was. The lowly will be exalted and the exalted will be brought low. A ruin! A ruin! I will make it a ruin! It will not be restored UNTIL HE COMES to whom it rightfully belongs; to him I will give it."

The sceptre which is spoken of is the distinguishing feature of the Ruler and the Lawgiver. Balaam's blessing also speaks of seeing a "star", something to which references are found in both the NT and in the Jewish literature.

The Aramaic Jerusalem Targum says of Balaam's blessing that *God will "raise up a King from the house of Jacob, a Destroyer and Ruler from the house of Israel"*. The Aramaic terms 'destroyer' and 'ruler' describe the Messiah's role. Jesus likewise declared that "Every plant which my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots" (Matt. 15:13). Targum Onqelos, which is officially recognised by the Synagogue, states that, *"Then a King will rise from Jacob and the Messiah of Israel will be anointed"*. Adolf Jellinek has made a collection of old Midrash stories in which he considers 'the blessing of our Father Jacob', 'the wars of the Messiah-King' and the 'signs of the Messiah'.¹⁰⁰ When he comes to 'the mysteries of Rabbi Shimon Ben Johai' concerning the Messiah, *Jellinek speaks of how "Metatron, the Prince of the Presence", reveals that the "days of the Messiah, which will last 2000 years", will come as foretold "and then a star will rise in the east, with a sceptre, and it will be the star of Israel, as it is written, 'A star will rise from Jacob' "*.

RaMBaN too, speaking of Balaam's vision, states quite plainly that, "*This prophecy refers to the days of the Messiah*".

The Jewish scholars refer to the aeons beyond which Balaam's "clear eye" sees. *Ibn Ezra*, whose interpretation is followed by all the most comprehensive commentaries, says that *Balaam is speaking first about "David, because it is said 'not now but further ahead, after 400 years' ". And then he says that there are "stars in the sky which are not known by history neither will be known". "Many have interpreted this as signifying the Messiah", but in the interim the Moabites, the Amalekites, and Assyria have arisen... "and the unlearned think that if the star is interpreted to mean David, then the coming of the Messiah will be denied. But away with the thought, because it is clearly said of the Messiah in the prophecy of Daniel, as I have explained, that he prophesied the rise of the Greek kings, the dominion of the Hasmonaeans, the building, siege, and destruction of the second Temple, and the subsequent salvation... "*

In the NT section we will speak of the star which was seen when Christ was born. Here, when we are focussing our attention on the time of the Messiah's advent, we ought to take into account what the Talmud and the Midrash say about the 2000-year Messianic age and that the Rabbis looked to the book of Daniel for light on the question of the coming of the Messiah, and further, that the possibility of a twofold Messianic advent also appears in these discussions. The official Jewish prayer book, Sidûr, contains, at least twice, the prayer:

"May it be thy will, O Lord our God and the God of our fathers, that we should keep thy commandments in this world and that we should earn, live, see and inherit the good part and blessing in the two days of the Messiah and in the coming eternal life." [101](#)

The prayerbook itself does not reveal what is meant by these "two days of the Messiah". Balaam understood that the Messiah would come "in the latter days". The letter to the Hebrews understands these days as beginning with Christ. [102](#)

Christ's first advent

Concerning his second coming Jesus said, "No-one knows about that day and hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Matt. 24.36). Maimonides says in his 12th article, which is appended to the Sidûr prayerbook,

"I believe with perfect faith in the coming of the Messiah, and, though he tarry, I will wait daily for his coming."

The idea that we cannot predict the time of the coming of the Messiah is somehow so deeply burned into our subconscious that we are easily misled into thinking that the Bible says nothing specific about his first advent. But is this so?

Ibn Ezra stated that "there is a clear account given of the Messiah in the prophecy of Daniel. And indeed: Daniel 9:24--6 gives a definition of *the time of Christ's coming, his main function, and what will happen to Jerusalem and the sanctuary at that time*. We read that:

"Seventy weeks of years are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy. "Know and understand this: from the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks. It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble. After the sixty-two weeks, the Anointed One (Heb. 'Messiah') will be cut off and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary".

This talk of the 'weeks of years' after which the Messiah is to come is so simple that even Jewish children understand it immediately. By 'week' is meant seven years. At what point, then, was the word given "to restore and rebuild Jerusalem"? In Nehemiah 2:1--8 we read of the decree of "King Artaxerxes". Artaxerxes Longimanus (465--424 BC) authorised Ezra the priest to rebuild the city of Jerusalem in the seventh year of his reign, that is, in 457 BC (Ezra 7:7--8 and 11--26). The majority of critics agree upon approximately this year.

The prophecy speaks first of all about seven weeks of years during which the Temple will be rebuilt, and indeed the books of Ezra and Nehemiah describe this 49 year building phase "in the midst of dire times". After this there are a further 62 weeks to the coming of the Messiah. $62 \times 7 = 434$ years. Altogether, then, the time from the issuing of Artaxerxes decree to the coming of the Messiah is to be $49 + 434 = 483$ years. Some writers analyse Daniel's prophecy counting up leap years and even days, but begin with whatever theory we may, it must be admitted that the prophecy fits the events surrounding Jesus. By simple arithmetic $483 - 457 = 26$, and the general consensus of opinion agrees on approximately that year as the one in which Jesus, after receiving the baptism of John, began his public career.

The Dead Sea Scrolls show that shortly before Jesus' time the whole land was swept by a wave of Messianic longing, a fact which is also attested to by Luke in the 2nd chapter of his gospel. Both the aged devout Simeon and the 84 year old prophetess Hannah belonged to those who awaited in the Temple the "consolation of Israel" and the "redemption of Jerusalem". In Galatians we read that God sent his Son into the world "when the time had fully come" (Gal. 4:4--5).

And what, according to Daniel, was the Messiah's main role? *The prophecy uses three times the word 'anoint', from which the word 'Messiah' is derived: the Most Holy is to be "anointed", the "Anointed One, the Ruler" is to come, and the "Anointed One" is to be cut off.* However, he will come "to seal up sin, to atone for wickedness, and to bring in everlasting righteousness". Thus the fulfilment of prophecy is confirmed "with a seal". The idea of "cutting (off)" used of the destruction of the "Anointed One" or "Messiah" is the word used in both Hebrew and Arabic for the making of a covenant. The Messiah will introduce a new covenant by means of his atoning death. This was the chief purpose of Christ's first coming.

What the Jewish scholars think about the coming of the Messiah

The most widely accepted Jewish exegete RaMBaM, Rabbi Moses Ben Maimon, better known as "Maimonides", wrote to his friends the same kind of encouraging letters as the Apostle Paul wrote. In his letter IGERET TEIMAN he says this of our theme:

"But Daniel has elucidated to us the profundities of the knowledge of the End Times. However, since they are secret, the Wise, may their memory be blessed, have barred the calculation of the days of the Messiah's coming so that the untutored populace will not be led astray when they see that the End Times have already come but there is no sign of the Messiah. For this reason the Wise, may their memory be blessed, have decreed: cursed be he who calculates the End Times... But we cannot assert that Daniel was wrong in his reckoning... ¹⁰³

In his booklet "The Statutes and Wars of the Messiah-King" RaMBaM gives a detailed account of mediaeval Messianic expectation and presents his own sound general principle:

"We cannot know, in all these and similar questions, how they will be fulfilled since they are veiled even from the prophets. Our teachers have no special doctrines on these matters, they simply follow the particular leaning of various verses, which gives no uniform doctrine. In any case, the main thing is not to make claims regarding the accuracy of the ordering of these doctrinal questions... as it leads

neither to the fear of God nor to love. Let us not, therefore, think about the Last Days. The Wise say: 'Cursed be those who predict the End Times'.¹⁰⁴

However, notwithstanding these warnings, dozens of predictions of the year of the Messiah's coming can be found in the Jewish literature. Even RaMBaM himself was guilty in this very IGERET TEIMAN pamphlet of determining the "year of salvation" as being 1212, by which time, fortunately, he was already dead.

The compiler of the main core of the Talmud, Rabbi Judah, who for this reason is generally honoured with the title of simply "Rabbi", as if no other were worthy to be compared with him, says of the times referred to in Daniel's prophecy that *"These times were over long ago"*.¹⁰⁵

These two mutually exclusive points of view -- that on the one hand the time of the Messiah's coming is past, and yet still he is awaited from day to day -- co-exist side by side in remarkable harmony. There are passages in the Talmud which stress the complete surprise of the Messianic advent: *"Three [things] come without warning: the Messiah, hidden treasure, and a scorpion"*.¹⁰⁶ Some of the scholars, such as R. Hillel, have said: *"There shall be no Messiah for Israel, because they have already enjoyed him in the days of Hezekiah"*.¹⁰⁷ According to some *Israel will not have a king from the house of David "until the dead rise again and the Messiah, the Son of David, comes"*.¹⁰⁸ *"But if Israel can keep the Sabbath commandments for two Sabbaths, they will be immediately saved"*.¹⁰⁹ Behind all this humming and hawing, however, the Rabbis saw the tradition of Elijah, according to which *the Messiah ought to have come after the 2000 years of the dominion of the Law, "but on account of our sins, which were great, things turned out as they did"*.¹¹⁰ Even in the well-known prayer for the Great Day of Atonement, which we will consider when we look at the Suffering Messiah, we find the words:

"The Messiah, our righteousness, has turned away from us: we are deeply shaken, nor do we know where to find someone to redeem us..." ¹¹¹

There is in the Talmud an extensive discussion of the Messiah's coming, beginning with the assertion of 'Rabbi' that "these times are long since past". The seat of the problem is whether the advent of the Messiah depends on repentance or observation of the Sabbath. Finally one of the Sages refers to the words of Isaiah 49:7: "... they will bow down, because of the LORD, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you". *And Rabbi Eliezer fell silent, because "this means that salvation will come in any case, even without repentance"*.¹¹² Even this text, after which follows a discussion of the Lord's servant as a "covenant for the people", the Rabbis understood Messianically.

The destruction of the Temple and the dispersal of the Jews was for the Sages a setback for their nationalist beliefs, since the Messiah ought to have come during the time of the second Temple. Haggai 2:9 promises: "The glory of this last temple is to be greater than that of the first" (trans. acc. to Hebr.). Malachi 3:1 says: "Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come." R. David Qim .hi says, "The Lord, the angel of the covenant, is the Messiah." Zechariah 11:13, when it speaks of the 30 pieces of silver which were cast into "the house of the LORD" and to which reference is made in connection with Judas Iscariot, presupposes the existence of the Temple. Further, Psalm 118:26, a hymn which according to the Rabbis will be sung to the Messiah when he comes, says: "From the house of the LORD we bless you". *The Messiah must, then, have come before the destruction of the second Temple.*

However, the Bible sets yet another time limit for the coming of the Messiah, which does not usually spring to mind. We read in Jacob's blessing that the sceptre will not depart from Judah "UNTIL HE COMES to whom it belongs, and the obedience of the nations is his". This means that the tribe of Judah must retain its identity until the Messiah who is to be a "covenant for the people" rises from it. The book of Ezra (1:5--8) shows us that Judah preserved the awareness of its origins through all the 70 year captivity, with even its own legal advisor while in exile. The Jews preserved their genealogies right up to the time of Jesus, losing them only with the destruction of the Temple. When the Romans conquered the land the Great Council or

Sanhedrin still had the right to the death sentence for murder. In Jesus' early childhood, in the year 6 AD, King Archelaus was deposed on account of his cruelty and intrigues. We are informed by the historian Josephus that a certain Essene by the name of Simeon had prophesied that this ruler, still Jewish albeit only nominally so, would be driven out in the tenth year of his reign, which is what actually happened. He was forced to flee to Gaul, and the Quirinius mentioned at the beginning of Luke's gospel sold his property as imperial stock.¹¹³ Thus Coponius was made procurator of Judah and the Sanhedrin lost most of its authority. It is to this that reference is made in John 18:31 when Pilate is told: "But we have no right to execute anyone".

The limitation of the nation's autonomy and rights of judgement was a calamitous misfortune. Rabbi Rahmon says:

"When the members of the Sanhedrin discovered that the rights of life and death had been torn from their hands a general consternation seized hold of them. They covered their heads with ashes and their bodies with sackcloth, shouting, 'Woe to us! The sceptre of Judah has been taken away and the Messiah has not yet come'."¹¹⁴

In the light of all this the Rabbis' speculation about the possible first advent of the Messiah is completely illogical -- he must already have come. R. Rahmon saw the Bible's own time limits.

The destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple as a sign of the coming of the Messiah

The prophecy of Daniel chapter 9 tells us that when the Messiah has been put to death, "the people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary". Josephus says that this refers to the Romans. Furthermore, the historian goes into some detail on this prophecy in two chapters:

"Daniel prophesied and wrote about all this many years ago. Similarly we can read in his writings about the way our people came under the yoke of Roman slavery and how our nation was destroyed by the Romans. All these writings Daniel left by God's command to give to the readers and students of history proof of the great honour God had granted him and to convince the doubters, who close out all possibility of guidance from life, that God still is concerned with the course of history."¹¹⁵

The Temple's destruction meant in particular the cessation of the sacrifices. The prophet Hosea foretold this: "For the children of Israel will live many days without king or prince, without sacrifice..."

Afterwards the Israelites will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king. They will come trembling to the LORD and to his blessings in the last days" (3:4--5).

Before that, though, the prophecy of Zechariah will be fulfilled: "And I will remove the sin of the land in a single day" (3:9). But are there any hints in the Jewish literature that the sacrifices will lose their efficacy?

Indeed there are! Both the *Mishna Sanhedrin* and the *Avoda Zara* speak of how 40 years before the destruction of the Temple the sacrifices lost their power and the gates of the Holiest of Holies opened by themselves. And the Talmud's *Masekhet Yoma* says:

"40 years before the destruction of the sanctuary... its western lamp went out and the doors of the sanctuary opened themselves. Then Rabbi Johanan Ben Zakkai (who died ca. 90 AD) rebuked them, saying, 'Temple, O Temple, why dost thou grieve so? I know this about thee, that thou shalt be destroyed. The prophet Zechariah has, after all, foretold of thee; Open thy doors, O Lebanon, so that fire may devour your cedars' (11:1). Rabbi Yitshak Ben Tablai said, 'That is why its name was called Lebanon, because it makes white the sins of Israel.' " This cryptic name 'Lebanon' for the Temple is derived from the root *laban* or 'white'.¹¹⁶

The well-known Jewish scholar Jacob Neusner writes in his book on Johanan Ben Zakkai that the events to which he refers were the result of the general corruption of morals and were a warning of the forthcoming disaster. In his account of these events he adds:

"Josephus recorded a similar omen concerning the massive brass eastern gate of the Temple's inner court. Though securely locked by iron bolts, the gate opened by itself in the middle of the night. The watchman of the Temple ran and reported the matter to the captain, he came up and with difficulty succeeded in shutting it."¹¹⁷

Neusner reckons that Josephus' account influenced Johanan Ben Zakkai who then for his part tried to give an explanation to the Rabbis. Josephus, however, did not begin writing about the Jewish wars until the year 77 AD, which makes it rather unlikely that he could have influenced Johanan Ben Zakkai's thought -- more probably the reverse. On the other hand, this tradition of the change of the nature of the sacrifice, according to which the transformation of the "shimmering cloth" from red to white had ceased, something to which the Talmud refers in three separate places, is too detailed to have been brought about by the influence of Josephus. RaSHI states that these remarkable events were manifestations of the *Shekhina*, the Presence of God, and it was as if the Holy Spirit were leaving the Temple.¹¹⁸

The real background to this miracle of which Josephus and the Talmud speak is to be found in the New Testament. Matthew, Mark and Luke say that the "curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom" at the moment of Jesus' death.¹¹⁹ The letter to the Hebrews also refers three times to the same event, giving it a spiritual interpretation.¹²⁰ We have now a firm and secure anchor of hope which "enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain"; Jesus went on our behalf "once for all into the Most Holy Place", and in this way "we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place", which is "a new and living way" opened for us. In the words of the book of Daniel, sin is now "sealed up" (AV margin), wickedness has been atoned for and everlasting righteousness brought in.

Since we know that Titus took Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple in 70 AD we can understand that when the Talmud speaks of the events of 40 years before this it is referring to the year 30, which is most commonly recognised as being the year of Jesus' death.

We have discussed the time of the Messiah's first advent in the context of the five books of the Pentateuch, since the Proto-evangel, Jacob's blessing and Balaam's vision in the old Rabbinic writings contain references to it. In connection with these the prophecy of Daniel 9 always comes to the fore. The Pentateuch's Messianic vision speaks of a far off time in the latter days, although it is to be fulfilled when it is still possible to prove that the Messiah is of the tribe of Judah. *By the time the city of Jerusalem and the second Temple have been destroyed, the Messiah ought to have already come.*

^{100.} Adolf Jellinek, *Beth ha-Midrash*, sifrei wahermann I-VI. Jerusalem 1967.

^{101.} *Sidur ha-shalem, Shaharith lahol and minha leshabat.*

^{102.} Hebr. 1:2

^{103.} *Igeret Teiman*, chap. 3 p24.

^{104.} RaMBaM, *Hilchot ha-Melachim*, chaps. 11 and 12.

^{105.} *Sanhedrin* 98b. and 97a

^{106.} *Sanhedrin* 97a.

^{107.} *Sanhedrin* 99a.

^{108.} *Sutta* 48b.

^{109.} *Shabbath* 108b.

^{110.} *Sanhedrin* 97a.

^{111.} *Mahzôr leYom kippur.*

^{112.} *Sanhedrin* 97b.

^{113.} Josephus, *Antiquities*, XVII, 13.

^{114.} Eg. Fred. John Meldau, *Messiah in Both Testaments*, Denver 1956, p30.

^{115.} Josephus, *Antiquities*, X.10 and 11.

^{116.} *Yoma* 39b.

^{117.} Jacob Neusner, *First Century Judaism in Crisis*, p73-75 and see also Josephus, *Jewish Wars*, VI; 5,3.

[118.](#) See the Talmud's interpretation in *Shabbath* 22b and *Minhōth* 86b.

[119.](#) Matt. 27:51, Mark. 15:38 and Luke 23:45.

[120.](#) Hebr. 6:19, 9:12 and 10:19.

THE MESSIAH IN THE PSALMS

The Psalms have a place of special importance as Messianic proofs in the preaching of both Jesus and the first disciples. Luke 24:44 tells us of Jesus saying to his disciples after the resurrection:

"This is what I told you when I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."

If we examine statistically the significance of the Psalms to the New Testament writers we will be surprised. In the Nestlé edition of the Greek NT there is a list of "passages in bold print which are direct quotations from the Old Testament." This list shows the NT as borrowing 224 separate passages from 103 different psalms, and with the same passages appearing in different places this gives a total of 280 psalm quotations in the NT. Approximately 50 of these deal with the sufferings, resurrection, ascension of Christ, and the spreading of the gospel to all nations. The other quotations are more of a teaching or comforting nature.

If, furthermore, we were to examine the relationship of the Jewish Sages to the Psalms as reflectors of the Messianic idea we would see that they in fact read the Messianic hope into more psalms than do the Christians. This expectation relates to King David. The eminent Joseph Klausner devoted only five pages of his book "The Messianic Idea in Israel" to the Psalms. Of their background he says:

"There is not another book in the Bible concerning which information about the time of its writing and the composition of its various parts differ from one another so widely as in the Psalms." "Where earlier critics approached the book as being in its entirety a work of Israel's King David, the bulk of the newer criticism does not see in the Psalms a single one which predates the Babylonian captivity." Klausner states that the Messianic idea as such is not the main theme, rather the "Messianic motif". Therefore, "understood in its wider sense, every chapter of the Psalms is full from beginning to end with a tinge of salvation expectation". Klausner reckons that the Psalms do not so much speak of a personal Messiah as of the "consolation of Zion and the gathering of the Jews from their dispersal".¹

Klausner's attitude, which is very common among the Jews, comes from the fact that he belonged to *Ahad ha-Am*, the followers of the father of prophetic Zionism, Asher Ginsburg. This group awaited the dawn of some kind of Socialistic golden age -- even Communism can be based on the Messianic Idea. There is in the Talmud the suggestion:

"If someone says to you 'Buy this field for yourself for one denarius' and its value is one thousand denarii... do not buy it", because the Messiah might come that year, and then the fields would be divided up without cost.² It is perhaps no mere coincidence that the Jewish-born Marx, Lassalle and Trotsky set themselves up in the early stages of Communism as its prophets -- the Messianic hope without a Messiah-figure easily gives rise to popular liberation fronts.

Tradition ascribes 73 of the 150 psalms to King David. In the Rabbinic literature the Messiah is constantly referred to as the "Son of David". For this reason, everywhere the future blessing of the house of David is described, the Sages saw Messianic material. Even the bridal mystery of psalm 45 is seen from a Jewish perspective as being an expression of the relation between the Messiah and Israel. When this psalm says "I

speak of the things which I have made touching the king (AV)" or "the nations will praise you for ever and ever," the Rabbis perceive the Messiah. But the NT also uses expressions associated with nuptials in describing the relation between Christ and the Church.³

The Jews find Messiah material in the "psalms of lamentation", in which the devout and guiltless man of God suffers the hatred of the people. Here it is not merely a question of a Messianic figure but of the whole of Israel itself participating in the "Messianic birth-pangs", *tsirei* or *hevlei ha-Mashiah*. These *yisurei ha-Malkhut* or "sufferings for the kingdom" become the lot of everyone who takes upon himself the yoke of the kingdom of God.

The Hebrew word for 'psalms', *tehillim*, means 'hymns of praise'. The Psalms, however, also contain many "prayers", *tephilloth*, and straightforward "hymns", *mizmorim*. It is no wonder that the Psalms have been called "Jesus' hymnbook" and that to this day they form the basis of the Jewish liturgy and book of prayer.

What the Psalms have to say about Christ

Before actually looking in detail at the Psalms themselves, it is worthwhile listing their basic message in the NT. *When discussing our theme, the term 'Messiah' is to be understood as meaning the Saviour expected by Israel. When we speak of 'Christ', however, we always mean our risen Redeemer Jesus Christ.*

The New Testament expounds virtually the whole history of salvation in the light of the Psalms. Christ was despised, Ps. 22:6, 69:19--22; he was rejected, Ps. 118:22; he was mocked, Ps. 22:7--8, 89:51--52; he was whipped, Ps. 129:3; he was derided, Ps. 69:8,20; he was impaled on a cross, Ps. 22:1--2, 14--17; he was thirsty, Ps. 22:16; he was given wine mixed with gall on the cross, Ps. 69:20--22; lots were cast for his garments, Ps. 22:18--19; his bones were not broken, Ps. 34:21; he rose from the dead, Ps. 16:10; he ascended to heaven, Ps. 68:19; he is at the right hand of God, Ps. 110:1 and 80:17; he is the High Priest, Ps. 110:4; he will judge the nations, Ps. 89:3--5; his reign is eternal, Ps. 89:35--37; he is the son of God, Ps. 2:7; he spoke in parables, Ps. 78:2; he calmed the storm, Ps. 89:10; the people sang Hosanna to him, Ps. 118:25--26; he is blessed for ever, Ps. 45:1--4,8,18; and he will come in his glory in the Last Days, Ps. 102:16--23.

The Bible's prophecies of Christ resemble a great jigsaw puzzle. The figure of the suffering Redeemer gradually emerges as the individual pieces are put together. The passages from the Psalms we have just mentioned complete the picture outlined by the Pentateuch and the Prophets. It should come as no surprise that Luther as early as 1513 -- that is, at the outset of his career -- lectured on the Psalms, in which he found an emphasis on righteousness and the grace of God. In the Psalms he found his Christ-centred thought ready-made. Later, in the prolegomena to his commentary on Galatians, he confides: "My heart is ruled by this one doctrine -- faith in Christ -- from which, through which and to which all my theological thoughts issue and return, night and day."

The Jews see the Messiah in the Psalms

in more or less the same contexts as do the Christians. But since they communicate in the Psalms' own language they find there secret references which they then apply to their own conception of the Messiah. Before looking at the Psalms in detail it is worth collecting a few examples of the way in which the Sages understood their own Messianic expectation.

a) In Christian circles Psalm 21 is not usually considered Messianic. The Midrash, on the other hand, sees the Messiah-King in its first and fourth verses; RaSHI attaches the same interpretation to v 7, and the Targum to v 8. We quote here the verses with which this Messianic expectation is associated:

"O LORD, the king rejoices on your strength... You welcomed him with rich blessings and placed a crown of pure gold on his head. He asked you for life, and you gave it to him -- length of days for ever and ever. Through the victories you gave, his glory is great; you have bestowed on him splendour and majesty. Surely you have granted him eternal blessings and made him glad with the joy of your presence. For the king trusts in the LORD; through the unfailing love of the Most High he will not be shaken."

The Midrash on the Psalms says of this king:

"This is the Messiah, the Son of David, who has been hidden until the last days. Rabbi Tan .huma says, 'The Messiah-King will come only to give the world six commandments, such as the Feast of Tabernacles, (the use of) the palm fronds, and the phylacteries, but all Israel will learn the Torah... and why so? Because the Gentiles will seek him.' "

After this the Midrash asks:

"Who is this king?... God will not crown a king of flesh and blood, but the Holy One -- may he be praised -- will give his own crown to the Messiah-King, because it is said of him, 'You placed a crown of pure gold on his head'. God will not dress an earthly king in his own purple robe, rather he has given it to the Messiah-King, for it is said, 'You have bestowed on him splendour and majesty'... And he will call the Messiah-King by name, for it is said, 'This is the name by which he will be known: The LORD our Righteousness'."

Even the Midrash on Exodus speaks of this same crown when it says:

" 'And Moses took the staff of God in his hand': God will not adorn an earthly king with his crown, and the Holy One -- may he be praised -- will place his crown on the head of the Messiah-King.⁴

In connection with the 8th verse the Targum says that the "*Messiah-King*" trusts in the LORD. It is significant that according to the Rabbis the purple robe and the crown were to be part of the Messiah's attire. The young Rabbi from Nazareth was however given this robe and crown of thorns only in derision.

b) *The Rabbis attach an equally beautiful allegorical discussion to the nuptial mysticism of psalm 45.* The most celebrated Jewish exegetes agree that *this psalm speaks of the "Messiah-King"*. It may be that its Messianic flavour comes out more clearly in the original than in the English versions, and so we will give a rendering here, from the Hebrew, of the verses which relate to this expectation of future salvation:

"A song of love: My heart overflows with beautiful words. I will recite: My song concerns the king, my tongue is the pen of a ready writer. You are more beautiful than the children of men, delight has been poured on your lips; therefore God will bless you for ever... Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever; your kingdom will be a sceptre of justice. You love righteousness and hate wickedness; for this reason God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of joy more than your companions... I will perpetuate your name from generation to generation: for this reason the nations will praise you for ever and ever" (Ps. 45:2--3, 7--8, 18).

It is remarkable to see how the Midrash relates this song in praise of the king to other parts of the Old Testament message. The Midrash on the Psalms states:

"Thus those who believe in the Messiah (Heb. lit. 'the righteous ones of Him who is to come') will one day praise the glory of God's presence and will not be hurt (by his holiness), as it is written: 'In thy presence there is fullness of joy, in thy right hand are pleasures for evermore' (Ps. 16:11 RSV). The Israelites asked... 'When will you redeem us?' He answered them: 'When you suffer the deepest oppression, then will I redeem you', as it is written: 'The people of Judah and the people of Israel will be reunited, and they will appoint one leader (Hos. 1:11)... He said 'For we are brought down into the dust' (Ps. 44:26)... and just as the rose blossoms and opens its heart upwards, so will it be for you when you repent before me, your hearts will be turned upwards like the rose's, and at that moment I will bring the Messiah to you, for it is said: 'I will be like the dew to Israel' (Hos. 14:6)... "

The Midrash goes on to describe the words 'My song concerns the king', and says that:

"This is a prophecy of the One who is to come, and Hannah too says that 'The LORD brings death and makes alive; he brings down to the grave and raises up'. In this way they will be brought down

until their feet reach the grave, and immediately I will raise them up; therefore it is said, 'He brings down to the grave and raises up'."⁵

There is a similar picture in the Talmud of the salvation of Israel in the last days from their "deepest oppression".

c) Very often, looking from the perspective of the Psalms, the oldest Rabbinic sources see "supra-historical" features in the Messiah. As an example of this kind of interpretation we might mention Ps. 72. Both the Targum and the Midrash understand the whole psalm Messianically. We will give it here in essence:

"Endow the king with your justice, O God, the royal son with your righteousness... In his days the righteous will flourish; prosperity will abound till the moon is no more. He will rule from sea to sea... He will deliver the needy who cry out, the afflicted who have no-one to help. He will take pity on the weak and the needy and save the needy from death... May his name endure for ever; may it continue as long as the sun. All nations will be blessed through him, and they will call him blessed" (Ps. 72:1, 7--8, 10--13, 17).

The OT "associative" method of which we spoke at the beginning of the book is clearly in evidence in the exposition of this psalm.

The king who will deliver the needy and the afflicted is, according to the Midrash, the Messiah, "for it is written: 'A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse, and he will judge the needy with righteousness' " (Is. 11:4). The whole psalm, the Midrash says, is "praise to the Messiah-King". Verse 17 in the Hebrew reads, "before the sun was, his name was *Yinnôn*", which means 'may it sprout' -- one of the eight OT names meaning a 'shoot', as in the verse from Isaiah. The Midrash also understands this name as being assigned to the Messiah "before the creation of the world".

RaSHI refers to psalm 72 in his exposition of Micah chapter 5 verse 2, which says of the Ruler of Israel who will be born in Bethlehem that his "origins are from old, from ancient times". According to RaSHI he is

"the Messiah, the Son of David, as Ps. 118 says, he is the 'stone which the builders rejected', and his origins are from ancient times, for 'before the sun was, his name was *Yinnôn*'."

R. David Qimhi, "without whom there is no correct biblical exegesis", according to the Sages, says unexpectedly:

*"It will be said in the Messianic age that his 'origins are from old, from ancient times'; 'from Bethlehem' means that he will be of the house of David, because there is a long period of time between David and the Messiah-King; and he is El (God), which is how he is 'from old, from ancient times'."*⁶

Psalm 72 tells us furthermore that the Messiah will be brought gifts, and the Talmud picks up this interpretation, saying that *"Egypt will bring gifts to the Messiah"*.⁷ The same secret appears in Jacob's blessing connected with the name *Shilo*. Ps. 76:12 contains a phrase which resembles this name, *shai lô*, or 'gifts for him': "Let all around him bring gifts to him who is to be feared". In this way Jewish biblical exegesis builds internal bridges from one hidden Messianic reference to another.

d) In addition to these "supra-historical" features the Rabbis frequently saw hidden allusions which the Bible itself could hardly be said to authorise, but which nevertheless have their own internal logic in the thought world of the Wise. In the lengthy psalm 78 there is the promise: *"I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things hidden from old"*. Verse 41 gives us the following for our consideration: *"Again and again they put God to the test; they vexed the Holy One of Israel"*. This specific phrase the "Holy One of Israel" appears 15 times in Isaiah. For example, in his description of the forthcoming "covenant of grace" Isaiah says:

"Surely you will summon nations you know not, and nations that do not know you will hasten to you, because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, *for he has glorified you (Hebr.)*" (Is. 55:5).

R. David Qimhi, who is considered as representing the "correct" biblical interpretation, explains this verse and that from Ps. 78 as referring to the Messiah:

"Incline your ear; the 'unfailing kindnesses promised to David' refers to the Messiah, for he is called David... He will be a teacher of the nations, as it is said at the beginning of Isaiah (2:4) 'He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples'."

The term "vexing" the Holy One of Israel, hitvû, used by the psalm, comes from the word tôv meaning a 'mark'. The Midrash also states that "the strokes left marks on the body", just as Ezekiel 9:4 speaks of the putting of a "mark" on the foreheads of all those who sigh and groan for Israel. In the same way RaSHI sees hitvû as meaning 'drawing a mark'.

A certain Christian Rabbi considered the above and then gave his own solution to this "ancient riddle". He pointed out that *the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet, tâv, on the ancient stone inscriptions and seals was written in the form of a cross. Understood in this way the verse above refers to the crucifixion of the "Holy one of Israel"*. Isaiah 50:6 speaks of the servant of the LORD receiving the "marks of beating":

"I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting... I will not be disgraced".

And Ps. 129:3 states graphically:

"Ploughmen have ploughed my back and made their furrows long."

Of this the Midrash says enigmatically:

"Tomorrow, when the end times come, the Holy One -- may he be praised -- will not say to the nations of the world, 'Thus and thus have you done to my son'. No. Rather, he will immediately break the yoke and shorten the reins, as it is said: 'I have broken the bars of your yoke' " (Lev. 26:13).

Could it be that it was similar convoluted thoughts Paul had in mind when he said in 1 Cor. 2:6:

"We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age"! Such enigmatic features are part of the mystery of Christ and especially so of the Jewish Messianic Idea.

We have seen in the above that even the psalms which Christians would not consider "Messianic" may in the opinions of the Jewish scholars allude to the saviour who is to come. On the other hand, these scholars take the whole OT message as their palette and with it depict the Messiah's supra-historical and enigmatic features. Mainstream Jewish Messianic expectation is, however, best seen in the same psalms on which Christians too traditionally rely in the elucidation of the roots of their faith.

[1.](#) Josef Klausner, *Ha-Ra'ayon ha-Meshihi*, p87-88 and 135-136.

[2.](#) *Avoda Zara* 9b as interpreted by RaSHI.

[3.](#) See eg. John 3:29, Matt. chaps. 22 and 25, 2 Cor 11:2 and Rev. 19.7.

[4.](#) See *Midrash Shemoth*, par. va-erâ 8 and the corresp. description from Midrash on Numbers. The main discussion is found in *Midrash Tehilim* 21.

[5.](#) *Sanhedrin* 97a.

[6.](#) The interpretations of both RaSHI and RaDaQ can be found in the *Mikra'oth Gedolôth* commentary.

[7.](#) *Pesahim* 118b.

PSALM 2 AND PSALM 110

Psalms 2 and 110 have from ancient times been considered almost as a pair. The letter to the Hebrews in particular quotes them side by side,⁸ and the Acts of the Apostles drew its strength from these sources.⁹

The Messianic tone of the second psalm

The theme of the second psalm runs as follows:

"Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the *LORD and against his Anointed One*. 'Let us break their chains', they say, 'and throw off their fetters.'... 'I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill.' I will proclaim the decree of the LORD: *He said to me, 'You are my Son, today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession.'*... *Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way.*"

This psalm is concerned with the "anointed one", in Hebrew "Messiah". Twice he is referred to as the "son". All the gentile nations will be given to him as an inheritance. He is to be greeted with a kiss, like a king or a teacher - just as the Talmud decrees; on meeting a teacher the student should kiss him on the hand.

When we read the Midrash's exposition of the Psalms we cannot but be amazed at the sheer volume of explanation which the ancient scholars draw out of them. Nevertheless, the same verses which are quoted in this context are generally accepted as Messianic references. *The Midrash speaks firstly of the "one who is to come", the "Messiah-King", before whom all will bow down, as it is said in Isaiah 49:23 "They will bow down before you with their faces to the ground". There are many OT passages associated with the phrase "I will proclaim the decree of the LORD" which, particularly for Christians, have a special message. The Midrash sets them out as following:*

"The decree is that of the prophets, because Is. 52:13 says 'My servant will prosper' and Is. 42:1 adds 'Here is my servant whom I uphold'; It is the decree of the Psalms, as Ps. 110:1 says 'The LORD said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand', and Ps.2:7 says 'He said to me; You are my son'; and also elsewhere it is written (Dan.7:13), 'In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds'. The LORD said 'You are my son'. The decrees are those of the king, the king of kings, that this would be done to the Messiah-King... "

Following this the Midrash states further that:

"Rabbi .Huna says: 'The sufferings of the world are divided into three lots; the first lot was granted to the patriarchs and to different generations, the second to the generation of destruction, and the third to the Messianic generation.'"

The Midrash also says that psalm 2 speaks of Solomon, King Ahaz and the Messiah:

"Ahaz, because Isaiah 7:11 says, 'Ask the LORD your God for a sign' ", and "the Messiah, because it is written, 'I will make the nations your inheritance'... And psalm 21:5 says, 'He asked you for life, and you gave it to him'."

Traditionally, the Jewish interpretation of psalm 2 can be divided into 3 streams: a) RaSHI explains that *"Our Rabbis have taught that this concerns the Messiah-King, and in harmony with this interpretation it can be applied to David himself.. "* b) Ibn Ezra reckons that the psalm refers to the *"anointing of David as king, for which reason it is written; 'This day I have begotten you', or else it concerns the Messiah..."* c) The popular expositions, such as the *Metsudat David*, are inclined to stress that *the words 'you are my son' are intended as a reference to Israel*. Indeed, since the early Middle Ages the suffering servant of Is.53 has been explained as an illustration of the oppression of Israel. RaMBaM, however, makes it clear that in general the Rabbis do not have a common theological interpretation, rather they follow "the peculiar emphases of individual verses, for which reason their teaching on these matters is somewhat inconsistent".

The strongest proof of the Messianic nature of these two psalms is found in the Midrash passage above with its seven separate Bible citations, all traditionally Messianic references. These observations would in themselves suffice as background for a Christian interpretation, but even more so if we add to them the

Talmudic discussion of the same things and the Zohar literature's cryptic references. There is an expression in Latin, *non multa sed multum*, according to which one should not present "many varied proofs" but rather "a specific amount" of the same rare examples. A professor of music once told a story about a world-famous teacher who, with his best pupil, worked at the same opera year after year. Finally the young man asked the maestro, "My colleagues already have many operas in their repertoires, when will I be ready to perform?" The teacher listened once more to his favourite opera and said, "You're ready now! This work contains the material for all other music." And indeed: the young man became famous overnight. The Christian would do well to familiarise himself with the scope of the older Jewish Messianic expectation on the basis of a small number of examples dealt with thoroughly.

The Talmud too has something to say about the Messianic character of psalm 2. Regarding the word "anointed" in verse 2 it explains:

"When the war of Gog and Magog is in sight they will be asked, 'Why have you come?' The answer will be: 'We have come against the LORD and his anointed', for it is written: 'Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?' " [10](#)

In another discussion we read:

"The Rabbis have said that this means the Messiah, the Son of David, who is to come quickly in our time. The Holy One will say to him: 'Ask of me, and I will give it to you', as it is written, 'I will proclaim what the LORD has decreed'. 'This day I have begotten you; ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance'. And because he saw the Messiah, the Son of Joseph, who was killed... I will ask you for nothing more than life... because it is written (Ps.21:5), 'He asked you for life and you gave it to him'." [11](#)

It is remarkable to see that in this discussion the Talmud quotes psalm 21 with which the Rabbis associated the picture of the purple-robed and *crowned Messiah who was to be "set as an eternal blessing for ever and ever"*. Here, for certain, it dovetails with the tradition of the Messiah, the Son of Joseph, according to which this son of Joseph, Ephraim, met his death while attempting to conquer the land of Canaan before the time of Moses.

When Israel a few years back made peace with Egypt some national leaders quoted the words of Isaiah chapter 19 which state that one day there will be a "highway from Egypt to Assyria" and that "in that day Israel will be a third, along with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing on the earth." The beginning of the same chapter says that "The LORD rides on a swift cloud and is coming to Egypt." *The Zohar tradition associates the words âv qal, literally 'light cloud', with verse 12 of Ps.2, 'Kiss the Son'*. The Aramaic word for 'son', *bar*, has a value of 202 in Gematria, and in the same way the Hebrew letters of *âv qal* together add up to 202. Such comparisons do not, of course, have any intrinsic value, but they do help to remind us of the Bible's internal coherence. When the *Zohar* describes this "son", *bar*, it appends to the description a trinitarian statement:

"You are the good shepherd; of you it is said, 'Kiss the Son'. You are great here below, the teacher of Israel, the Lord of the serving angels, the son of the Most High, the son of the Holy One, may his name be praised and his Holy Spirit." [12](#)

At this point it is worth noting that the Jewish scholars were aware of the special nature of the divine revelation. Since the name *Elohim*, 'God', right at the beginning of the Bible is actually in the plural and the verb which accompanies it always in the singular, there have been attempts, particularly in the old Zohar tradition, to explain the various "faces" of the being of God. *The Zohar uses five expressions which refer to the doctrine of the Trinity: tlât rishin, 'three heads'; tlât ruhin, 'three spirits'; tlât havayôt, 'three forms of revelation'; tlât shmehin, 'three names'; and talta gvanin, 'three shades of interpretation'*. These Aramaic words express God's "being", just as in English the word 'godhead' is used.

The Zohar asks:

"How can these three be one? Are they one only because we call them one? How they are one we can know only by the urging of the Holy Spirit and then even with closed eyes."¹³

It should be pointed out that the word 'trinity' does not even appear in the New Testament. The doctrine of the "three in one" is primarily a "postulate of practical reason", to use an expression of the philosopher Immanuel Kant. The Zohar too makes a similar kind of inference.

The Zohar refers to this problem of God's self-revelation by the name *razei de-Shlosha* or '*The mystery of the number three*'. They are like the "outer shell of the inner truth", as the Rabbis have said. *This mystery will one day be revealed by the Messiah:*

"And this is the spirit which will rise from the hidden wisdom, and which is called the spirit of life; and that spirit is ready to give this wisdom in its due time through the Messiah-King, as it is written (Is.11:2):'And the spirit of the LORD will rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and of understanding'."¹⁴

From these quotes we see that the Zohar refers to the Son mentioned in psalm 2 as the "Son of the Most High" and of "the Holy One," and that this anointed "shepherd" and "teacher" is also "the Lord of the serving angels" -- which emphasis in the letter to the Hebrews and in the Dead Sea Scrolls is associated with the Messiah. The Messiah will also one day reveal the mystery of the trinity. Furthermore, the Zohar builds bridges between this psalm and, for example, Isaiah's Messianic prophecies.

The Messianic nature of psalm 2 must have been in my mind when Pope Paul VI visited Israel at the beginning of April 1964. People were standing in droves at the roadside waiting to catch even a glimpse of him, but the city's prelates had been invited to the Catholic church on Mount Zion. I was shepherded into this chosen group wearing my Finnish clerical robe, which bear a strong resemblance to the vestments of a Catholic bishop, and we stood and waited in the front chancel of the church for our turn to greet the Pope. When one of my Jewish Christian colleagues genuflected before his high-ranking overseer I began to wonder how a Lutheran pastor should, according to the rules, act in such a situation. Then I remembered the words of psalm 2: "Kiss the Son!" That means Christ! At home I had been taught as a boy, on being introduced to someone, to click my heels together and give a firm handshake, and so while the others were kissing the Pope's ring I decided on my course of action. When the frail saintly figure of the Pope stretched out his hand I took hold of it, bowed, and squeezed hard -- possibly underestimating the strength I applied. The holy fingers crumpled up in my hand and I saw something not unlike the expression of the Lord's suffering servant flash in the pontiff's eyes. He studied this representative of the Nordic Vikings for a moment and seemed to say to himself, "That can't be one of our bishops". The aide at his side then received an order in Italian to give me a souvenir medallion, a great copper coin which still sits on my desk testifying to me that I have thus received forgiveness for all my sins both future and past. If the mediaeval Catholic understanding is worth anything I can further add to this merit the fact that my sins are also forgiven through having lived in the Holy Land. There must have been a tiny spark of humour in the Pope's eyes all the same -- it was an additional experience for him too!

The picture in psalm 110 of the one sitting at the right hand of God

Psalm 110, which as we observed earlier has often been considered a "twin" to psalm 2, is also given a Messianic interpretation by the Sages, to the extent that there is no essential disharmony between the Christian and Rabbinic exegesis of both these psalms.

The psalm in outline is as follows:

"A psalm of David. *The LORD says to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.'* The LORD will extend your mighty sceptre from Zion; rule in the midst of your enemies... The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind: *'You are a priest for ever, in the order of Melchizedek.'*"

The NT sees in this psalm a reference to Christ. The Acts of the Apostles, Paul's letters, and in particular the Letter to the Hebrews testify to its Messianic use.¹⁵ Jesus also cited this psalm when he set the Pharisees a difficult question which none were able to answer. He said:

"What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?' 'The son of David', they replied. He said to them, 'How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him "Lord"? For he says: "The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet." If then David calls him "Lord", how can he be his son?' ¹⁶

The best known expositions which we have been following are comparatively late expressions of the Rabbinic perspective. To take two examples; RaSHI, Solomon Yarchi, died in 1105 AD and Ibn Ezra, the son of Abraham Meir died towards the end of the same century. If in them, despite all their opposition to Christianity, we still find some mention of the Messianic character of a certain passage, it will have particular weight as a witness to our case. Psalm 110, they say, refers primarily to Abraham. *RaSHI says of the psalm that it is right to interpret it as touching Abraham, "but there is a difficulty in the fact that it speaks of Zion, which was the city of David"*.

The Midrash on the Psalms says of the verse 'Sit at my right hand', that *"he says this to the Messiah; and his throne is prepared in grace and he will sit upon it"*. The Talmud refers to psalm 110 when discussing Zechariah 4:14 -- "These are the two who are anointed to serve the LORD of all the earth" -- and states:

"By this meant Aaron and the Messiah, and I do not know which of them I should prefer. When it is written, 'The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind: You are a priest for ever', we know that the Messiah-King is more agreeable than the Priest of Righteousness."¹⁷

Right up to the Middle Ages the Rabbis continued this discussion. Rabbi Shim .on the Preacher (*ha-Darshan*), who lived towards the end of the 12th century and collected together the Talmud's old legends and preaching, summarises the traditional understanding of the status of the Messiah as follows:

"Rabbi Yodan says in Rabbi A .han Bar Haninan's name that 'The Holy One will set the coming Messiah-King at his right hand and Abraham at his left'; and so Abraham's face will become white with envy, and he will say, 'The son of my son sits on your right and I must sit on your left?' Then the Holy One will appease him by saying, 'Your son is on your right and I am on your right.'"¹⁸

The Rabbis say in their discussions that, according to psalm 72:17, *the Messiah was granted this position before the creation*.

It is remarkable that the idea of the Messiah's special status also comes to the fore in the Rabbis' exposition of other psalms. Of these, three are primarily worthy of mention: a) Psalm 16:11 says:

"You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy on your presence, with eternal pleasures at your *right hand*."

The Midrash for psalm 45 constructs a bridge between the "fairest of the sons of men" (Ps 45.2) and psalm 16, saying:

"Thus, those who believe in the Messiah will one day worship the glory of the presence of God and will not be harmed (from having looked upon him), as it is written: 'You will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand'."

b) Psalm 18:36 promises:

"You give me your shield of victory, and your *right hand* sustains me."

The Midrash explains this Davidic hymn, saying that, *it refers to the "coming of the Messiah", and adds:*

"If deliverance were to come in one wave men would be unable to stand such a great liberation, and so it will be accompanied by great sufferings, which is why it will draw near gradually... like the dawn."

c) The third isolated reference to the status of the Messiah is found in psalm 80, in the 18th verse of which the Rabbis perceive the Messianic motif:

"Let your hand rest on the *man at your right hand*, the son of man you have raised up for yourself." Verse 15 speaks of the "vine" which the "right hand" of God has planted. Ibn Ezra explains this as being an analogy in which "*that which is compared concerns Israel and the Messiah, the son of Ephraim*". As we have already seen, the idea of the suffering Messiah is often in Judaism connected with this son of Joseph, Ephraim.

The words the "right hand" of God, the "sustaining of the right hand", and the "right hand man" are thus connected in some way with the Messiah, and are to be taken in conjunction with psalm 110. These Rabbinic interpretations give their own intelligible explanation to the intellectual background of the Apostles' Creed, in which we confess that we believe Christ "sits at the right hand of God, the omnipotent father".

When, in connection with these 'twin' psalms, we have had to speak about the Messiah as the Son of God, and even about the Zohar's "mystery of the number three" which is associated with these psalms, it is worth pointing out that such ideas, usually associated with Christian theology, are also a natural part of older Judaism. They are not, in other words, mere creations of the Church. Furthermore, they sometimes spring from the most surprising Bible passages.

The last verse of psalm 2, "*blessed are all who take refuge in him*", also appears in psalm 18, another psalm containing the Messianic motif (v.30). *The word "Rock", mentioned in v. 31 is understood in the Talmud, when discussing Moses' hymn in Deuteronomy ch. 32, to mean "the Messiah, the Son of David"* (Deut. 32:15).¹⁹ This "refuge" in psalm 2 relates to the "son", who is honoured by greeting him with a kiss. I remember how I kept watch by our son's sick bed in Jerusalem in Easter week 1959. He had been unconscious for four months, but before this last phase and before he went blind he had seen our Saviour and knew that he was dying. At that point an academic Jewish friend of ours came to the hospital to see us. He knew of our affection for the Jews and urged me to convert to Judaism with my seven year-old son. I said to this well-meaning linguist that we had no reason to do so as we believed that Jesus has fulfilled the Law and that he is the Son of God. "That," I explained, "is what I myself believe and that's what my son believes." "But", my friend protested, taking a Bible out of his briefcase, "God doesn't have a son. Show me where it says so."

I made a silent prayer, because a glib answer will not satisfy someone who is in earnest. Somewhere from my subconscious a verse arose of which I had no recollection of knowing. "Read Proverbs 30 verse 4", I said, and he read:

"Who has gone up to heaven and come down?... What is his name, and the name of his son? Tell me if you know!"

"This will have to be explained", my friend said, "It can't just be taken as it stands." I asked him to read on:

"Every word of God is flawless; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him. Do not add to his words, or he will rebuke you and prove you a liar."

Somehow it seemed that the words went home. These verses speak also, as we saw when discussing the Pentateuch, of the Messiah's "descent into the deep" and his "ascent into heaven" which belong to his role as the fulfiller of the Law.

The Letter to the Hebrews occupies itself at length with the description in Ps 110 of the High Priest: "You are a priest for ever, in the order of Melchizedek." And so Christ "in the days of his flesh, offered up prayers

and supplications, with loud cries and tears" on our behalf. "Another priest" was needed "in the order of Melchizedek", a priest "who holds his priesthood permanently", because perfection could not be attained "through the Levitical priesthood". "He is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them. For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, blameless, unstained, separated from sinners, exalted above the heavens." Christ went "once for all into the Holy Place, taking not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption."²⁰ What does it matter if such quotations are meaningless to the modern reader? They at least show that our faith is rooted in Old Testament thought.

It is remarkable to observe the central tenets of Christianity set out in Jewish exegesis of psalms 2 and 110.

 8. Heb. 1:5 and 13, 5:5 and 6 or 7:17,21

9. See eg. Acts 13:33-36, 47

10. *Avoda Zara* 3b.

11. *Sukka* 52a.

12. Zohar, part III p307, "Amsterdam edition"

13. *Ibid* II p43.

14. *Ibid* III p289.

15. Acts 2:34, 1 Cor. 15:25, Eph. 1:21-22 and eg. Heb. 1:13

16. Matt. 22:41-46.

17. *Avôth, Rabbi Nathan, chap. 34.*

18. *Yalqut Shimoni* Ps. 110, *Nedarim* 32b and *Sanhedrin* 108b. The subject is also touched upon in the following books: David M. Hay, *Glory at the Right Hand, Psalm 110 in Early Christianity*, New York 1973; Jacques Dupont, *Assis à la Droite de Dieu, L'interprétation du Psaume 110:1*, Vaticana 1974, 340-442.

19. *Sanhedrin* 38a.

20. See Heb. 5:6-10, 6:20, 7:11-17, 24-27 and 9:12 (RSV).

PSALM 22 AS THE INTERPRETER OF THE SUFFERING MESSIAH

The Psalms often describe the trials a devout person suffers in partaking of the "birth pangs of the kingdom of God". When they relate to David they are often explained as "Messianic birth pangs". This is how the Targum expounds psalm 20, the beginning of which speaks of the "day of trouble", and the verse 6 says that "*LORD will help his anointed*". In the same way we have seen that the Targum speaks of the Messiah in the context of psalm 21, and that the Midrash adds a discussion of his "crown" and purple robe.

A still wider perspective is opened up by psalm 22, which in Christian exegesis is part of the picture of the Suffering Messiah. It has been said of this psalm as of the 53rd chapter of Isaiah that it was written at the foot of the cross. The beginning of the psalm speaks of the sufferings of the Messiah, and the end speaks of his covenant meal.

The psalm begins with a cry: "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" The psalmist relates how:

"I am a worm and not a man, scorned by men and despised by the people. All who see me mock me; They hurl insults, shaking their heads: 'He trusts in the LORD; let the LORD rescue him. *Let him deliver him, since he delights in him.*'... I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted away within me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death. Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, *they have pierced my hands and my feet.* I can count all my bones; people stare and gloat over me. *They divide my garments among them.*"

The latter part of the psalm seems to underline the significance of the work of the Lord's suffering servant: it begins with praise, speaks of some kind of covenant meal, of how "posterity will serve him" and how his

righteousness will be proclaimed "to a people as yet unborn". *RaSHI says of the words, "the poor will eat and be satisfied" (v.26), that this will take place in the "time of deliverance, the days of the Messiah".* In this way the psalm itself dovetails with the Messianic mission.

The psalm concludes with an outpouring of praise:

"From you comes my praise in the great assembly; before those who fear you, will I fulfil my vows. *The poor will eat and be satisfied*; they who seek the LORD will praise him -- may your hearts live for ever! *All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD*, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him, for dominion belongs to the LORD and he rules over the nations. All the rich of the earth will feast and worship; all who go down to the dust will kneel before him -- those who cannot keep themselves alive. *Posterity will serve him*; future generations will be told about the LORD. *They will proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn -- for he has done it.*"

It is true that the Rabbis see the Messianic nature of psalm 22 only in its closing section, the 'praise' or *shevah*, which refers to the "time of deliverance, the days of the Messiah". The words of the beginning of the psalm, however, appear now and then in descriptions of the Lord's suffering servant. In, for example, the Midrash literature's *Pesikhta Rabbati*, the compilation of which took place probably in the 8th or 9th centuries but which is based on traditional material stretching back to a much earlier period, portrays the Messiah Ephraim, the son of Joseph, as follows:

"Our Rabbis have taught that one day, in the month of Nisan (Easter time), the Patriarchs will come to him and say: 'Ephraim, Messiah, Our Righteousness. Although we are your fathers you are greater than us because you have suffered for the sins of our children and have gone through great and difficult trials... you have become an object of scorn and ridicule in the midst of the nations for the sake of Israel, and you have sat in the darkness and the depths... your skin has been torn off, and your body is dried out like wood... and your strength like a potsherd. You have suffered all this because of the sins of our children.'²¹

Ibn Ezra says of verse 18, in which the Lord's suffering servant's garments are divided and lots are cast for his clothing, that "*they are royal vestments; if he were not a king these words would make no sense. And further, there is a hidden reference here.*" In his exposition of the closing verses he says: "*Finally, in the end times, they will come and bow down before the king, who will gather their souls together.*"²²

The Midrash on the Psalms relates the theme of psalm 22 to Esther, even though there is no direct link between the two. Professor M.D. Casutto, who is known for his commentaries on the whole Old Testament, says of this psalm that "*it depicts a man tortured in both body and soul*". The words of the introduction which say that the psalm is to be sung "to [the tune of] 'The Hind of the Dawn'" refer, in traditional accounts, to Esther -- although the strange word used for a particular musical instrument and way of singing mean in Hebrew "*the radiance of the dawn*". This radiance is surely more appropriate in reference to the Messiah, the "light of the world", and of whom the Messianically understood passage in Hosea (6:2--3) says that *he will rise "on the third day"* and that "*his arising is as sure as the dawn*" -- here we have the same Hebrew word *shahar*, 'dawn', as in the verses above.

Concerning v 16 "they have pierced my hands and feet", a footnote in some versions (eg. NIV and RSV) gives an alternative rendering:

"A band of evil men has encircled me, my hands and my feet *like the lion.*"

The Rabbis were aware of these two readings in the original text. Rabbi David Qimhi said that, "*The uncircumcised interpret this psalm as pointing to Jesus*". Regarding verse 16 he says that they read the original as *ka'aru*, 'pierced', instead of the alternative *ka'ari*, 'like the lion', and understand it as meaning Christ, "*the Lord before whom all who go down into the dust will one day have to kneel*". RaSHI stated bluntly that in actual fact this depicted someone whose "*hands and feet are as if they had been mangled in a*

lion's mouth". Luther also knew of this difficulty, and the German Bible follows the *ka'aru* or 'pierced' reading.

If the mention in the psalms of the clothes for which lots are cast contains a "hidden reference", then also the meal which it describes raises many questions. According to RaSHI, it refers to the *"time of deliverance, the days of the Messiah"*. But what kind of thoughts does this meal connected with the Messiah's coming raise?

The first sentiments which arise from the interpretation above relate to Holy Communion which the Lord instituted with the Paschal meal, and in which, at least in the high churches, "all kneel down before him". When we take Communion "in remembrance" of the death of Christ, the words of our psalm which say that "all the ends of the earth will remember" are fulfilled, and when we "proclaim the Lord's death" the psalm says that one day "his righteousness" will be proclaimed, "for he has done it". In the closing verses the word 'Lord' is four times used of the saintly sufferer, and to that is added that "posterity will serve him". The word 'serve' in the Hebrew of this verse, *avad*, means worship as to God.

Psalm 22 begins with a cry and ends in the words "he has done it". The Hebrew uses the word *âsâh* which according to some commentators is related to the last verse of the Creation account, Gen.2:3.²³ It is as if our psalm were thus presenting the "accomplishment" of the atoning work. If Jesus spoke in Aramaic here, as in the first part of the psalm, then his cry *kullah*, 'it is finished', would correspond to the content of the Greek verb. In Hebrew and Aramaic this word is used in the context of sacrifices. In this way Jesus made a "total sacrifice" on our behalf, and it is this sacrifice we remember in Communion.

The most significant discussion relating to the "Messiah's meal" and to Communion is found in the Midrash for the book of Ruth. If truly "all the prophets have prophesied not but for the days of the Messiah" it will be appropriate alongside the Psalms to show something from the early Jewish literature of what Ruth says regarding the Messiah. Ruth 2:14 tells us of Boaz, who said to King David's grandmother Ruth, "Come over here. Have some bread and dip it in the wine vinegar." *Midrash Ruth in its exposition of this verse says four times that if anyone "partakes of the Messianic meal in this world he eats for the world which is to come". Four times the Midrash underlines that this bread is "the bread of the kingdom", and four times it is said that he who eats of this bread is "near the kingdom". Furthermore, three times it is stressed that this "wine vinegar" speaks of suffering, and certain Rabbis, speaking "in the Holy Spirit", say that "wine vinegar is one of the sufferings spoken of in Isaiah 53 when it is said that 'he was crushed for our iniquities' ".²⁴* In the NT section we will speak in more detail about the background to the Holy Communion and that of some other "Messianic meals". In psalm 22, however, we already find this covenant meal of the "time of deliverance".

We have seen that psalm 22 is also connected with the sufferings of the Messiah in Jewish exegesis. It begins with Jesus' cry of pain and depicts his death on the cross, which terminated in the word *kullah*, 'it is finished'. Reference is also made to the "Messiah's meal," thus offering support to the understanding that the Lord's Supper is found in the Old Testament.

Psalm 118 and the "stone which the builders rejected"

We understand that a natural bridge to the Messianic interpretation of the psalms is formed particularly in those which refer to King David. Psalm 118, however, which, among the Jews, is traditionally associated with the inauguration of the Temple, gives additional information on the Rabbis' wide-ranging Messianic expectation. This well-known psalm was also one of Luther's favourites, as it had helped him "out of difficulties from which no king nor ruler" could have freed him. The first part of the psalm speaks of how the sons of Aaron, the priesthood, trust in the LORD:

"In my anguish I cried to the LORD, and he answered me by setting me free. The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid... The LORD is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation."

The latter part of the psalm, beginning at v.20 relates to the description in Ezra 3:11 of the laying of the Temple's foundation stone. It is part of the *Hallel* or 'praise psalms', 113--119, which played a special part in all the Temple's greatest festivals. It is the closing section of this psalm which is customarily sung during the afternoon celebrations of the 14th of Nisan; in the family Passover ceremony on the same evening; on the actual Passover day; at Pentecost, the day on which the Law was given; on the great "hosianna day" during the Feast of Tabernacles; and during *Hanukkah*, the celebration of the re-dedication of the Temple in 164 BC. Thus every devout child knows these verses off by heart from an early age, and Jesus' disciples sang them as the conclusion to the Lord's Holy Communion (Matt. 26:30 and Mark 14:26).

The traditional Messianic interpretation is concerned primarily vv.20--26: "This is the gate of the LORD; the righteous shall enter through it. I thank thee that thou hast answered me and hast become my salvation. *The stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner.* This is the LORD's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes. This is the day which the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. *Save us, we beseech thee, O LORD!* O LORD, we beseech thee, give us success! *Blessed be he who enters in the name of the LORD!* We bless you from the house of the LORD. (RSV)

Rabbinic exposition of the Psalms makes Messianic inter-connections between passages in which Christian exegesis would not expect to find any relation. We have seen how RaSHI joins the passage in Micah chapter 5, about the ruler who is to be born in Bethlehem, with the "cornerstone" of psalm 118, and also with the "shoot" in psalm 72:17 which was before the sun, moon and course of the stars.

Most shocking is the fact that the Rabbis consider it possible that the Chosen People might not accept their Messiah, as we have seen in the exposition of Jacob's blessing. This idea, however, comes most clearly to the fore in the passage about the rejected cornerstone. But is it also connected in some other ways with the Messiah?

Both the Midrash on the Psalms and the Talmud describe how the verses above were customarily sung antiphonally: *The inhabitants of Jerusalem said within the walls, "O LORD, hosanna" (that is, "save us"), and the men of Judah on the outside said "O LORD, grant us success", the inhabitants of Jerusalem, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD" etc.*²⁵ When Jesus, at the beginning of Passion Week, rode into Jerusalem we remember that people spread out their cloaks and palm fronds on to the road and sang: "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed be he who comes in the name of the LORD. Hosanna in the highest!" (Matt. 21:9, Mark. 11:9--10, Luke 19:37--38 and John 12:13--15)

*Rabbi Aqiba explains in the Talmud that it was the Holy Spirit who gave this song, and that the Israelites sang it as they crossed the Red Sea.*²⁶ The tradition here is associated with the names of Rabbis Jehudah and Shmuel, who said that, *"The prophets have commanded Israel that on the day of their salvation they are to sing this to their saviour."*²⁷

The Zohar connects the theme of psalm 118 to Israel's departure from Egypt. Exodus chapter 15 begins with the words "Then Moses sang", and describes the deliverance of Israel from the Red Sea. The Zohar explains that *"there is a reference here to the 'One who is to come'... Therefore Israel is to sing this to Him who will come."* And *"God will once more extend his hand to save the remnant of his people."* Then they *"who died through the serpent's beguiling will arise and they will become the advisors of the Messiah-King."* This song is a "royal" song and it speaks of *"the community of faith and the coming of the Messiah"*. The Zohar repeatedly uses of the Messiah the name *"The Holy and Most High King"*. In the future, *"in the days of their Messiah-King, Israel will praise the fact that it is a joy for them to gather together at the house of the Holy One"*. *"The words 'He has become my salvation' indicate the Messiah-King."* When the Holy King comes we will *"rejoice and be glad over his salvation; and his salvation means, of course, the LORD's salvation,*

which has come back to Zion."²⁸ The Zohar's exposition, which has not suffered to any significant extent from the Synagogue's internal censorship, represents for orthodox Jews the normative, generally accepted stance.

RaSHI, who saw the Messianic nature of the psalm, also says of *Isaiah 28:16* that it points to "the Messiah-King who is to be the touchstone of Zion". Indeed that verse states that God will

"lay a stone in Zion, for a foundation stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone of a sure foundation: 'He who believes will not be in haste' " (RSV).

The Hebrew word for 'haste', *yahîsh*, means "hurrying" or "rushing" -- the Christian does not rush! Christ really did come as the "touchstone" of Israel. The saintly Simeon was one of the first to see this when he said, in Luke chapter 2, that the Christ-child was "destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against".

The Hebrew uses two words for 'cornerstone': *even pinnah* or *rôsh pinnah*, 'cornerstone' or 'head of the corner'. The Metsudat David says that, *this rejected cornerstone "will thus be put in the most coveted place of all", for everyone to see.*

Jesus spoke harsh words in Matthew 21 about the owner of the vineyard who sent his son to see what had happened to his servants. "They will respect my son", he said to himself. But they "took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him". Then Jesus spoke words which Professor David Flusser of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem considers the most severe in the New Testament. "They are so harsh", he once lectured, "that Jesus is hardly likely to have uttered them". But Jesus did indeed say:

"Have you never read in the Scriptures: 'The very stone the builders rejected has become the head of the corner; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes'? Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation producing the fruits of it. He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but when it falls on any one, it will crush him." When the chief priests and Pharisees heard his parables they perceived that he was speaking about them. (RSV)

Perhaps it was with these words in mind that Paul said he would turn to the Gentiles (Acts 13:46).

But could Jesus have said so? There is a passage in the Talmud on Jeremiah 13:17, which speaks of the prophet's spirit "weeping in secret because of the pride" which will not give the glory to God, the result of which will be that "the LORD's flock will be taken captive". *Rabbi Shmuel Bar Yits .hak says that this is the result of "the pride of Israel, which is why the Torah will be taken away from them and given to the Gentile nations"*.²⁹ So we can understand that Jesus too was quite capable of using such severe language.

By "builders" the Jewish scholars generally mean "teachers". The New Testament too refers on several occasions to "building" in Christ. At the end of Ephesians chapter 2 we are told that we are:

"built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the *chief cornerstone*... And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit".

In the same way Peter encourages us to:

"Come to him, to that living stone, rejected by men but in God's sight chosen and precious; and like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house... For it stands in scripture: 'Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and he who believes in him will not be put to shame.' To you therefore who believe, he is precious, but for these who do not believe, 'The very stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner', and 'a stone that will make men

stumble, a rock that will make them fall', for they stumble because they disobey the word... " (1 Pet. 2:4--8).

The Christian is to be built up as a "living stone". But how can a stone live? In the games of our childhood we used to play a guessing game with old postcards. The pictures stood for either "animal, vegetable or mineral", and a correct guess earned the card to keep. All the dead objects were "minerals". In Arabic, however, it is possible to speak of both living and dead stones. An Arab pastor once explained to me as we went along the Bethlehem road that an unworked, shapeless stone which has not yet been in the hands of the master is always *a dead stone*, but on being shaped it *comes to life*. It thus has *a form which will "support and carry others"* and it *"fits in to its own place"*. If the building should for some reason collapse or if it is abandoned, these *"living stones"* which have been fashioned by the mason *can be used in another building*. In this way a stone which has been rejected can become the capstone of a new building. From the time of Hammurabi, arches in the east have been built in such a way that their walls would burst inward if the keystone were to be taken away.

Since psalm 118 is expounded in the light of Isaiah 28:16 in both the Rabbinic literature and the New Testament, it is worth giving an example of how the Jewish scholars understand the Messiah to be the "touchstone of Zion":

" 'Touchstone' here represents three conditions: 1. firstly it will be a touchstone strong and tested and firmly founded, because it is true stone, neither composed of sand and foreign matter; 2. secondly it is of such a value and form that it will be placed as a cornerstone which is precious like sapphire, as a precious stone, so that it might become a precious cornerstone; and 3. it must be on a firm foundation because the whole building rests upon it. It will be the foundation of the foundations and will support the whole structure. The analogy means that this king has, on the one hand, been himself tested and found to be wholly righteous, free of error, and clear in his thinking. The word *yahîsh* (to be in haste) means that he will later become the cornerstone which will prove to be the precious seed of the house of David and the foundation of the foundations... 'He who believes will not be in haste' means that this will not happen at once, but there will first be great tribulations.³⁰

Psalm 118 proves in fact to be a decisive factor in the understanding of salvation-history. It speaks unequivocally of the fact that the Messiah will initially be rejected but will one day be exalted to his rightful kingly station. As we can see from the following case, the individual Jewish Christian may also find consolation in this:

A certain young student, while supervising the building of a high-tension electricity line on the slopes of Mount Carmel, chanced to find a torn New Testament which had been thrown into the undergrowth. His father was a teacher of the Talmud in a local college and so the son was also well acquainted with the Rabbinic literature. Straight away on his first reading he realised that Jesus was the Deliverer he had been searching for in the Old Testament and in his father's writings, and only two weeks later he confessed his faith to his father. The latter then offered him money, a house, and even a wife, if he would only give up his conviction. (In devout Jewish families the parents choose their children's partners; they do, after all, have more experience in the matter than their offspring!)

Our student had not yet left home at Passover time. After eating the Paschal meal, the *seder*, it was the custom to sing the *Hallel* psalms, and when they had sung psalm 118 the youngest member of the family, a boy of 19, asked his father, "What is this stone?" Father went completely silent. "Dad, what is the stone which the builders have rejected?" Once more the head of the family remained silent, even though he always answered the Passover evening questions. "Dad, what is the stone which has become the cornerstone?" the boy asked a third time. At that our believing student requested permission to reply, and his father nodded. The young man's answer was enigmatic: "It is what is between father and son!" Being accustomed to Qabbalistic riddles the rest of the family understood immediately who he was talking about.

'Stone' in Hebrew is *even*: reading the first part of this (in Hebrew characters) three-letter word gives the word *âv*, 'father', reading the latter part from the middle gives *ben*, 'son'. Of course everyone knew that Jesus had come between the father and his firstborn son. Before long the student had to leave his family and change his name. His new Hebrew name meaning 'independent', speaks of the great change which had taken place in him. As an authority on oriental languages and with his knowledge of Greek he was entrusted with the main responsibility for translating the New Testament into modern Hebrew.

Psalm 118 climaxes in a salutation addressed to the deliverer:

'O Lord, save us' (Heb. *hōshiâh-nâ*, 'hosanna')... "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD. From the house of the LORD we bless you."

We saw already how the word 'LORD', *Yahweh*, in the Rabbinic literature is associated with the Messianic epithets. In the same way, according to the book of Daniel, the Messiah is to come while the Temple is still standing, and on the other hand while the "sceptre" of the tribe of Judah has not yet been taken away. Thus being so, Jesus really was greeted "from the house of the LORD".

We have already seen that the Psalms draw a fairly sharp picture of the sufferings of the Messiah and of his glory at the right hand of God, and we have seen how his "righteousness" will be proclaimed to a people yet unborn. Psalms 89:4--5, 21--22 and 26--27 describe the *Messianic fulfilment from the point of view of the covenant*:

"I have made a covenant with my chosen one... I have raised up my chosen one... with my sacred oil I have anointed him... He will call out to me, 'You are my Father, my God, the Rock my Saviour'."

The message of this Messianically interpreted psalm is conjoined in its own way to the discussion of the rejection of the Messiah. The Metsudat David in its exposition of the psalm says that *this is a covenant of grace, and that "it has been given to the seed of David for ever, and will not be abrogated even in their dispersal, as it will be returned in the days of the Messiah and will never again cease"*. ³¹

Psalm 102 and the return of the Messiah in his glory.

Despite the fashionable thesis of our time which states that it is not appropriate to build an artificial Messianic-fulfilment bridge between the Old and the New Testaments, we have already seen over what broad a span Jewish and Christian biblical exposition dovetail together. In the light of both psalm 2 and the Dead Sea Scrolls God will "beget" the Messiah, the Messiah was "before the sun" and even present at the Creation, his lot will be one of being "scorned by men and despised by the people" until he is exalted and set up at the right hand of God -- and even the Chosen People will one day accept him. But is there actually anything in the Psalms about the Last Days? Can we find there any reference to the second coming of Christ?

Rabbinic discussion of the End Times is mainly connected with the picture in the book of Ezekiel regarding the war of Gog and Magog and the prophecy of Joel regarding the Day of the Lord. *When discussing the tribulation in the Last Days, however, the Rabbis cite the words of psalm 89:51 about the "steps of the anointed one" which will be heard at that time. These iqvôt ha-Mashiah or 'footsteps of the Messiah', are, it is true, in part a reflection of the preaching of the early Christian church, and we will look at them in more detail in the New Testament section.*

We ought nevertheless to be aware of the fact that Professor Joseph Klausner, for one, sees a clear connection between the description of the End Times in the New Testament and the *Messianic birth-pangs* of which the Rabbis speak.³² The Talmudic scholars picture the Messiah arriving in the middle of a crisis for

humanity. These birth-pangs connected with the last generation relate to individual morals, the history of the nations and the whole of creation. Just a short example of this:

*"If you see kingdoms arming themselves one against another, you can expect the coming of the Messiah."*³³ *"The Messiah, the Son of David, will not come until the whole world is filled with apostates (Heb. minût, by which the Rabbis seem to understand the 'Christians')."*³⁴ *"The Son of David will not come until judges and authorities cease to be in Israel."*³⁵ *"The Messianic footsteps will appear when insolence increases... the leaders fall into fornication... the wisdom of the scribes begins to stink, there is no longer a fear of sin, truth vanishes and that generation's face is reminiscent of the face of a dog; young people will belittle their parents and adults will have to rise in the presence of their children... the son will not honour his father. Upon whom can we then lean? Only on our Father who is in heaven."*³⁶

We could add here the so-called "Messianic signs" according to which

*in that time there will be dreadful diseases, plagues and epidemics", "the whole world will be bathed in blood" "the sun will be darkened and the moon changed to blood"*³⁷

There are descriptions corresponding to these both in the words of Christ and the letters of Paul.³⁸

It is worth keeping this symmetry in mind when studying Jewish scholars' expositions of psalm 102, which gives a description of the "last generation". Characteristically, Klausner devotes to the Psalms less than 4 pages of his 345 page book on the Messianic idea in Israel, his only four-verse quotation being from psalm 102.³⁹ This work, the only one written by a Jew which deals exclusively with the Messianic idea, follows of course, all the historico-critical studies in western languages up to the second decade of this century, but its weakness is in the fact that the Midrash literature and the Targums are not much in evidence. Jonathan Ben Uzziel, for example, is mentioned only once. Klausner refers to the answer received by Rabbi Hillel's greatest pupil Jonathan when he began to translate into Aramaic the part of the Old Testament known as "the writings", to which the psalms belong:

"Then a voice was heard from heaven, which said, 'enough! -- for in them you will find the Messiah of the end times.'"⁴⁰

Klausner thinks that in this way disillusionment of the kind experienced by the people at the time of Bar Kokhba was avoided. This quotation also informs us that it was Targum Jonathan, containing as it does a consistently Messianic interpretation, which was rejected on this account by the Synagogue.

Klausner, with whom I conversed at length on two occasions, saw his life's work, in addition to his studies of Jesus, as being the promotion of "prophetic Zionism". He did not believe in the Messiah as a person. For this reason he said of the Psalms that, "In a broad sense the whole book of Psalms is Messianic from beginning to end, as it is full of latter-day salvation expectation."⁴¹

Psalm 102 divides more or less into two parts. I remember a certain man who on his release from a concentration camp weighed only 26 kilos. With his last remaining strength this friend of nature had followed the movements and migration activities of the birds. The "Prayer of an afflicted man when he is faint" in psalm 102 had been of comfort to him. *Its first part is almost a description of the horrors of the concentration camp:*

"My days vanish like smoke; my bones burn like glowing embers. My heart is blighted and withered like grass; I forget to eat my food. Because of my loud groaning I am reduced to skin and bones. I am like a desert owl, like an owl among the ruins. I lie awake; I have become like a bird alone on a housetop. All day long my enemies taunt me; those who rail against me use my name as a curse. For I eat ashes as my food and mingle my drink with tears... My days are like the evening shadow; I wither away like grass."

Literature could hardly provide a more pointed description of one man's tribulations.

In the 12th verse of our psalm the *shevah* or 'praise' section begins, which Klausner quoted as a prophecy of the Messianic restoration:

"You will arise and have compassion on Zion, for it is time to show favour to her; *the appointed time* has come. For her stones are dear to your servants; her very dust moves them to pity. The nations will fear the name of the LORD, all the kings of the earth will revere your glory. *For the LORD will rebuild Zion and appear in his glory.* He will respond to the prayer of the destitute; he will not despise their plea. *Let this be written for a future generation* (Hebr. "the last generation"), that the people not yet created may praise the LORD: 'The LORD looked down from his sanctuary on high, from heaven he viewed the earth, to hear the groans of the prisoners and release those condemned to death (Hebr. "the children of death").' So the name of the LORD will be declared in Zion and his praise in Jerusalem when the peoples and the kingdoms assemble to worship the LORD... In the beginning you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you will remain... "

I remember a lady who was shocked that this psalm speaks of the Jews as the "children of death" who are "destitute". However, one day God will once again "rebuild Zion and appear in his glory". *The Rabbis say of the words "the prayer of an afflicted man" at the beginning of the psalm that they refer to David, who often spoke of himself as being "afflicted"*. The *Midrash for the Psalms*, which on the strength of this considers the whole psalm as one of David's, tells of how these prayers were read at New Year and on the Great Day of Atonement, that *God wishes to make his people into a "new creation"* and that "the people not yet created" will praise the Lord.

There is a direct line from the expressions of psalm 102 to the gospels. Our psalm uses a technical term found often in the Jewish literature dôr aharon, the 'last generation'. The Dead Sea Scrolls likewise use the same term in their descriptions of the generation of the crisis in the End Times. This appears in, for example, the Damascus fragment I,11 and 12, and also in the commentary on Habakkuk I,3; II,7; and VII,2. The Hebrew word a .haron means simply "last". Since the Jewish literature has another term dôr ha-Bâ, "future generation", which is often used, there is good reason to follow the specific meaning of the phrase dôr aharon in translating psalm 102, even if Western thought does not in general accept the Bible's eschatological point of view. This comment also holds good for the exposition of the New Testament.

It is often claimed that Jesus taught he would return in his glory during the lifetime of his own generation. Such claims, however, overlook the fact that, according to Matt. 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21, he spoke a great deal about the "signs" of the End Times which would be fulfilled BEFORE his second coming. These include the fact that the "gospel must first be preached to all nations" and that "Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles [in other words, the age of the preaching of the Gospel] are fulfilled" -- and furthermore, the world will fall into a historic, even cosmic, chaos before his coming. So that his disciples would not be perplexed by the tarrying of their Master he gave in the three chapters mentioned the parable of the "fig tree", Israel, as a sign which was to be closely followed. *All three first gospels display the same pattern, in which there is first the parable of the fig tree, then the words "this generation will not pass away" before his coming, and finally the affirmation that, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away". Psalm 102 speaks in verses 26--27 of the passing away of heaven and earth as a sequel to the picture of the tribulation of the "last generation". It adds, "They will perish, but you remain!" It is quite possible that Jesus in his eschatological description spoke of the tribulation in psalm 102 and of the event of his return in glory after the rebuilding of Zion.* Zion is, after all, one of the affectionate names for Jerusalem. At any rate, the claim that Jesus himself expected a speedy return is both rash and unscholarly.

Psalm 102 offers an extremely valuable addition to biblical eschatological expectation. RaSHI says of this psalm that its message should be *"told to the last generation. And the 'people who will be created' means that God will make a new creation to release them from bondage to freedom and from darkness to light"*.

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- [21.](#) *Pesikhta Rabbati* 33-37.
- [22.](#) *Mikra'oth Gedol'oth*, Ps.22.
- [23.](#) See eg. Keil-Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament* V, pp327-328.
- [24.](#) *Ruth Rabbah*, V parashâ.
- [25.](#) See *Midrash and Pesahim* 119a.
- [26.](#) *Sutta* 6b.
- [27.](#) There is a far-ranging discussion of this in eg. *Beit Ya'akov* in the *Sid'ur* prayerbook, Warsaw 1880, pp520-521.
- [28.](#) Zohar, the parashâ *be-shallah* which begins at Gen. 13:17, 216-227.
- [29.](#) *Hagig'ah* 5b.
- [30.](#) See the *Malbi'm* Hebrew commentary, *Bi'ur ha-Inyan*, Is. 28:16.
- [31.](#) See *Mikra'oth Gedol'oth*, psalm 89.
- [32.](#) Klausner, *The Messianic Idea in Israel*, pp283-286 (Hebrew).
- [33.](#) *Ber. Rabbah* 42.
- [34.](#) *Sanhedrin* 97a.
- [35.](#) *Sanhedrin* 98a.
- [36.](#) *Sutta* 49b.
- [37.](#) Jellinek, *Beit ha-Midrash*, vol II pp58-63 "The Messianic signs" and vol. VI 117-120 "The wars of the Messiah-King".
- [38.](#) See eg. Matt. 24 and 2 Tim. 3:1-7.
- [39.](#) Klausner, *The Messianic Idea*, pp133-136.
- [40.](#) See Klausner p272 and *Megilla* 3a.
- [41.](#) Klausner p88.
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THE PROPHETS OF THE SOUTHERN KINGDOM, JUDAH

The prophets of Judah can be divided into those who were active before the deportation and those whose ministry was carried out actually during the time of the captivity itself. To the former group belong *Obadiah, Joel, Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Micah, Isaiah and Jeremiah*; to the latter *Ezekiel and Daniel*.

The history of the kings of Judah is related primarily by the books of Chronicles. The nation's well-being is dependent on the Temple and on the people's own call as a priestly nation. Jewish tradition, which is also accepted by many Christian scholars, states that the books of Chronicles were written by Ezra -- the last two verses of 2 Chronicles are in fact identical with the first two of the book of Ezra. The books of Kings, on the other hand, follow for the most part the events which took place in Israel, the northern kingdom. Ezra then comes into this picture with his description of the reconstruction of the temple after the captivity and of the hopes associated with this. Both before and after the deportation to Babylon (in 586 BC) the prophets stress the significance of law and justice in the life of the nation.

The Messianic hope is seen in the distant future by the prophets of Judah. They speak of the "day of the Lord" and of the "day of wrath", in which the nation of Israel and the whole of creation will be sifted.¹⁶ Isaiah too describes the same all too familiar cosmic outlook known to us from the book of Joel.¹⁷ "But I will leave within you the meek and humble, who trust in the name of the LORD. The remnant of Israel will do no wrong..." and those rescued from Zion will find refuge.¹⁸ But what do the prophets of Judah have to say about the days of the Messiah?

The vision of Obadiah,

by which name this, the shortest book in the Old Testament, is known, depicts for us the conflict between Edom and Zion: "The day of the LORD is near for all nations..." In that day the house of Jacob will be a fire and the house of Esau will be like stubble. It is said of that time that we should not look down "on the

Jews in the day of their disaster". But "on Mount Zion will be deliverance" and "the kingdom will be the LORD's". *Yalqut Mechiri says in connection with this book that,*

"the word of God speaks in ten tongues: prophecy, vision, preaching, speech, sayings, commands, examples, jokes, riddles and prediction."

In one chapter Obadiah twice mentions the "deliverance" associated with Zion. For this reason *the Rabbis consider it worth asking here, "When will the Son of David return?" and they describe how Israel in those days will be left all alone. The Yalqut also brings in the words of Zechariah: "On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives" (14:4). And then he will come of whom it is said that, "a star will come out of Jacob, a sceptre will rise out of Israel" (Num. 24:17). The passage which says that "on Mount Zion will be deliverance" refers to "The one who is to come"... "Earlier the kingdom was Israel's, but since they fell into sin the kingdom was taken from them and given to the gentile nations and the land was sold to strangers". The Yalqut appeals here to Ezekiel 30:12, which speaks of the coming punishment "by the hand of foreigners". However, according to the last verse of Obadiah, in the end the "kingdom will be the LORD's".*

Joel's Messianic message

is a powerful word even for the Rabbis. Joel 2:23 in particular has given rise to discussion:

"Be glad then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the LORD your God: for he hath given you the former rain moderately and he will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month" (AV).

The phrase "the former rain moderately," *morêh litsdaqâh* (or AV margin "former rain according to righteousness"), really means *'the teacher of righteousness'*, although the word *morêh* 'teacher' is in fact synonymous with the usual word for 'autumn rain', *yorêh*. Thus Ibn Ezra, for example, explains: *"teacher means that he will teach the way of righteousness" and "there is a long period of time between the former and the latter rains"*. Rabbi David Qimhi understands the whole analogy as pointing to the Messiah: the words of the following verses about the "threshing-floors" being filled with grain are a *"parable of the days of the Messiah"*. *The word "afterwards" (v 28) means "the End Times, which are the days of the Messiah, as it is written: 'The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD' (Is. 11:9)... , and 'I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh' refers to Israel... 'and they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest'."* This final line is taken from the passage describing the "new covenant" in Jeremiah (31:34). *The Metsudat David also explains the outpouring of the spirit as referring here to the Messiah's time.* This Rabbinic interpretation certainly gives abundant food for thought when approaching the New Testament!

Joel 3:18 speaks eventually of *"a fountain"* which *"will flow out of the LORD's house"*. This is virtually the opposite of the picture of drought and famine at the beginning of the prophecy. The book of Amos also closed with the statement that when God restores the nation's fortunes *"the reaper will be overtaken by the ploughman and the planter by the one treading grapes"*. Isaiah 35 and 65 for their part associate similar happenings with the final Messianic fulfilment. *Yalqut Mechiri sees here a connection with the picture in the Midrash which speaks of God, in the days of the Messiah, pouring down manna from heaven and opening a spring which will flow from the house of the LORD.* Thus the "first saviour" Moses and the "last saviour", who is yet to come, are reminiscent of one another, and so *RaDaQ interprets this as referring to the days of the Messiah.*

*The Dead Sea Scrolls too mention the "Teacher of Righteousness" here and there.*¹⁹ The basis of this Qumran Messianic figure is understandably the words of Joel 2:23. RaSHI likewise hints at this interpretation when at the beginning of his commentary on the book of Zechariah he says that,

"Zechariah's prophecies are impenetrable... we will never understand the truth of his words until the Teacher of Righteousness comes".

And it is indeed true that Christian Messianic interpretation receives abundant support from the book of Zechariah.

Joel's description of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is borrowed almost in its entirety by Peter in his preaching on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:16--21). The Talmud says of the Holy Spirit that,

"after the last prophets had died the Holy Spirit left Israel, although the heavenly voice (*bath qôl*, the 'daughter of a voice') could still be heard".²⁰

The scholars understood that the Spirit of God would function in an entirely new way on the arrival of the Messiah. Again, in the description of the day of the Lord Joel 2:32 sets out the Bible's simplest doctrine of salvation, which Paul borrows in Romans 10:13: "Everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved".

Zephaniah

son of Cushi, or "dark-skinned", was apparently of mixed blood. He was, however, a fourth generation descendant of King Hezekiah and according to tradition a childhood friend of the prophet Jeremiah. It may well be that Zephaniah had had the opportunity of encouraging the young king Josiah in his spiritual reformation, which took place in the year 622 BC. He was above all the prophet of the approaching Day of the Lord and of revival:

"Seek the LORD, all you humble of the land, you who do what he commands. Seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you will be sheltered on the day of the LORD's anger" (2:3).

God will one day "purify the lips of the peoples". "The remnant of Israel will do no wrong, they will speak no lies" (3:9,13). A missionary in her early days in Israel, a Dr Aili Havas, was once listening to a Jewish academic praising the high moral standards of the pioneers who had come to Israel: apparently violence, theft and alcoholism were unheard of in the whole country! At length the young graduate, as she was at that time, spoke up: "Well I must admit that in Finland we have plenty of crime and alcoholism -- but Finns don't usually tell lies." At that her Jewish acquaintance let slip, "Are they as stupid as that?" To some extent this is illustrative of eastern attitudes, even though the Rabbis themselves emphasise that *"truth is God's seal"*.

Zephaniah 3:9, which speaks of "purifying the lips of the peoples" says that mankind will one day serve the Lord "with one mind" -- in Hebrew *shechem ehad*, 'shoulder to shoulder' (NIV), or 'in concert'. The Yalqut points out that according to the Talmud, *"the nations will be blessed through Israel in the days of the Messiah"*.²¹ Regarding the promise in Zephaniah 3:11 that God will "remove from this city those who rejoice in their pride", and that "Never again will you be haughty on my holy hill", the Yalqut reminds us of the discussion in the Talmud which says that *"The Son of David will not come until boasting has ceased in Israel and until God takes away the people's pride... and leaves a miserable and troubled people"*.²² The last chapter of Zephaniah contains yet another deep consolation for the stricken soul: "He will quiet you with his love"... God will "rescue the lame and gather those who have been scattered" and will restore their fortunes. "The sorrows for the appointed feasts I will remove from you; they are a burden and a reproach to you!"

The prophet Habakkuk

was active in the last years of King Josiah (640--608 BC). He "stood at his watch", "observed" and then "made his complaint about the degradation of the people of Judah. In his ministry he uttered words which have been immensely influential in Christian and in Essene thought. *The words of Habakkuk 2:4 -- "the righteous will live by his faith"-- appear three times in the New Testament.*²³ The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament made ca.200 BC, translates this verse as *"the righteous will live ek pisteôs*

mou, 'from my faith' or 'from my faithfulness' " according to its secondary meaning -- the believer lives, then, through faith effected by God.

The doctrine of Justification by Faith is an essential part of the Old Testament's Messianic vision. Daniel 9:24 speaks of the "anointed" or Messiah, who will "make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to *bring in everlasting righteousness*" (*KJ acc. to Hebrew*) Jeremiah 23:6 and 33:16 stresses that the Messiah's name will be "*the LORD Our Righteousness*"; and Isaiah 53:11 compresses the significance of the death of the Lord's suffering servant into the saying that "my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities". This, as we have seen, answers to the import of the last verse of psalm 22, that the Messianic meal "*proclaims his righteousness... for he has done it*".

The Dead Sea Scrolls contain a remarkable statement in the commentary on Habakkuk: "*And God commanded Habakkuk to write what will happen in the time of the last generation; he did not, however, reveal to him the final decree. In saying that 'he may run who reads it' he was referring to the Teacher of Righteousness, to whom he has revealed all the secrets of his servants the prophets.*"²⁴

The Yalqut speaks of a vision "*which waits, but which will not be late*": the Talmud says of it that "*the End Times are already upon us, but the Messiah has not yet come*".²⁵ There follows a reference to Abraham's significance as the Father of the Faith: "*Israel will one day sing a new song to Him Who is to Come, as it is written: 'sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done wondrous things' (Ps.98:1); What right does Israel have to sing this? For Abraham's sake, because he believed... and the righteous will live by his faith.*" This simplification of the commandments to a few individual precepts is compared in another parallel passage with "this one" commandment of faith, which is the most important of all.²⁶ It is no wonder that Paul made a bridge between the faith of Abraham and the words of Habakkuk in the third chapter of the letter to the Galatians.

Habakkuk 3:18 concludes the prophet's vision with praise: "Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Saviour. The Sovereign LORD is my strength." *Targum Jonathan* explains that this word is connected with the deliverance which the Messiah will bring about, and with the miracles he will perform. Very often the prospect of joy is associated in the Old Testament with the coming of the Messiah, as we see in, for example, the 9th, 60th and 61st chapters of Isaiah or in Joel 2:23 and Zechariah 9:9.

The prophet Micah

gives a more detailed account of the Messianic hope than the other pre-exile prophets. He was active during the reigns of Judah's kings Jotham (740--732 BC), Ahaz (732--716) and Hezekiah 716--687). Both Micah and Isaiah, who were contemporaries, had the same concern for the nation and in part even word for word the same message:

"Here, O peoples, all of you, listen, O earth and all who are in it... In the last days the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as chief among the mountains... and peoples will stream to it... The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem." (cf Micah 1:2, 4:1--2 and Isaiah 1:2, 2:2).

Both speak in the same terms of the Messiah's appearing.

Micah sees the tribe of Judah in the last days being once more a blessing. At that time:

"One who breaks open the way will go up before them; they will break through the gate and go out.

Their king will pass through before them, the LORD at their head." (Micah 2:13)

When discussing Perez in connection with Genesis chapter 38 we saw that the *Messiah who will break down the hedge around the law is the "one who will prepare the way", porêts, of Micah's prophecy. The same root*

connects this "pioneer" with the wider discussion of the Messianic office. RaSHI saw in Micah's words "their deliverer, the one who will open the way", whereas RaDaQ reckoned that "the one who will open the way is Elijah, and their king is The Branch, the Son of David". The Rabbis saw a connection between this verse and the description of Elijah at the end of Malachi, Elijah who will once more "turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers". (Malachi 4:6)

The Targum describes the king of Micah 4:7--8 who signifies the Messiah:

"I will make the lame a remnant, those driven away a strong nation. The LORD will rule over them in Mount Zion, from that day and for ever."

The Targum says somewhat oddly that,

"Israel's Messiah has been concealed on account of the sins of Zion, but later the kingdom will dawn for him".

The coming ruler in the beginning of chapter 5 who will rise from the tribe of Judah *is also understood by the Targum as indicating the Messiah.*

"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."

Again it is worth recognising that when looking at, for example, psalm 118 we saw that RASHI identifies this ruler with the "cornerstone" which will be rejected, and with the *Yinnon* or 'flourish' idea in psalm 72:17. The *Yinnon* Messiah was before the sun, moon and course of the stars. This special name also describes how he will "awake the children of the dust from the dead" It is quite impossible to understand what the New Testament has to say without some familiarity with these roots of our faith which arise from the Jewish literature.

The Messianic tone of the book of Micah is also apparent from the fact that both the Talmud and the Midrash each attach to it their own discussions of the coming Deliverer.²⁷ Micah has, however, as does Isaiah, his own message of comfort:

"He has shown you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." "I wait in hope for God my Saviour... Though I have fallen, I will rise. *Though I sit in darkness, the LORD will be my light... He will bring me out into the light; I will see his justice.*" "Who is a God like you, who pardons sin?... You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea." ²⁸

We may mention here that according to Daniel 2:22 God "reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what lies in darkness, and *light dwells with him.*" One of the Messiah's secret names, "Nehora", is taken from this verse, and when we looked at psalm 22 we saw that the Midrash speaks of the Messiah who "has sat in the darkness and in the depths" -- Micah also promises that the Lord our Light will come into the darkness of men.

The prophet Isaiah

was active for forty years after the death of King Uzziah in 740 BC. Jewish tradition says that he was the son of the brother of Uzziah's predecessor Amaziah, which would make him Uzziah's cousin. This would also give an explanation for the fact that he would seem to have had direct access to the ruling family and the possibility of having some influence on the political decision-making of the day. Isaiah lived at a time when the corruption of the kingdom of Judah was not yet at its worst. Nevertheless, as a prophet he was one of "history's storm petrels" and foretold the nation's impending destruction. The shoot of hope was to sprout from the "stump of Jesse" only when it had been cut right to ground level (Is. 11:1 and 10).

Isaiah outlines the Messiah's prophetic and high-priestly office. He sees his birth, his majesty, his humiliation and the glory of his exaltation. Isaiah also describes the resurrection hope, the new heaven and earth, and the last judgement.²⁹ He has justly been called the "Old Testament's Evangelist". Furthermore, just as the whole Bible is divided into the 39 books of the Old Testament and the 27 of the New, the first 39 chapters of Isaiah are primarily proclamations of judgement and the last 27 a "book of consolation". In general the first part of the prophetic books are judgement on the nations, and the latter chapters contain comfort and Messianic hope. However, the note of rebuke and forgiveness sounds right from the opening chords to the final chapter.

*The Messianic nature of the book of Isaiah is so clear that the oldest Jewish sources, the Targum, Midrash and Talmud, speak of the Messiah in connection with 62 separate verses. Anyone who wishes to familiarise himself with this background can refer to the list below.*³⁰ Even though these works tell us something of the roots of our Christian faith, the most important thing is always the message of the Bible as it stands.

Certain basic features dominate Isaiah's preaching. They come to the fore in both the general nature of his presentation and in his Messianically interpreted words.

a) *Firstly, the message of repentance and consolation are apparent right at the beginning of his prophecy:*

"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 any more? Why do you persist in rebellion? Your whole head is injured, your whole heart afflicted." "Wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight!" " 'Come now, let us reason together', says the LORD; Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool' " (1:1--5,16,18).

b) *Even rebuke is presented with poetic beauty by the prophet:*

"I will sing to the one I love a song about his vineyard: My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit. 'Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad? Now I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed; I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled' " (5:1--5).

Here we have reflections of both the breaking down of the "hedge around the law" and the "trampling" of Jerusalem (Eph. 2:15 and Luke 21:24), and we have another example of how the New Testament makes proper sense only in the light of the Old.

c) *Isaiah's Messiah-pericopes often have their own historical background: we read in Isaiah 7:14 that,*

"The LORD himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him *Immanu-El* ",

which means 'God with us'. It would appear that the prophet may have been referring to Zechariah's daughter Abijah, who was the mother of Hezekiah the son of Ahaz (2 Kings 18:1--2). The Jews expected this devout king Hezekiah to become the real liberator of the nation from the northern threat. The word .almah, which the Septuagint translated 200 years before Christ to mean primarily "virgin", was, however, also a "sign" of what was to come. In the same way the beginning of ch. 9 with its mention that "in the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali" refers to the tribute lands of the Assyrian king

Tiglath-Pileser. "In the future", however, "he will honour Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan". And so it was that the precise areas in which Jesus carried out most of his ministry came to experience that "the people walking in darkness have seen a great light". "And the government will be on the shoulders" of the child, on whom Isaiah pinned all his hopes. Even his name has a divine quality: "Wonder, Counsellor, God, Hero, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace (Is. 9:1--6 acc. to the Hebrew). The emphasis on the "future" also leads to a Messianic interpretation, in which the coming Deliverer's supra-historical features are taken into account.

d) *The vistas of hope illuminated by the prophet dawn, according to both Isaiah and the rest of the prophetic literature, on the "remnant" of the people.*³¹ Isaiah uses of this the terms "shoot", "Branch" and "root".³² This "Branch of the LORD will be beautiful and glorious... the LORD will wash away the filth of the women of Zion; he will cleanse the bloodstains from Jerusalem... " (4:1--4). The "Anointed" of the Lord will comfort the humble, those in prison, and those who are sorrowful, giving them "the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness", as promised in eg. chapters 42, 52 and 61. A noted scholar once pointed out that Hebrew is the only one of the Semitic languages like Ugaritic or Aramaic which does not lack the concept of "hope". Exile, oppression and despair have given birth to this word *tikvâh*, from which Israel's national anthem *Ha-tikvâh* derives its name.

e) *Isaiah's Messianic hope is personified in his "book of consolation" in the many touching descriptions of the "Lord's suffering servant"*. The most important of these are Is. 42:1--7, 49:1--6, 50:4--9 and 52:13--53:12. Chapters 61 and 62 add the final touches to these features. *The Targum refers to the Messiah as the Lord's servant three times: firstly, in the words of Is.42:1, "Here is my servant whom I uphold... I will put my Spirit on him"; secondly, regarding the servant of 43:10, whom God has "chosen"; and thirdly, in 52:13, in which the Synagogue's pericope of the "suffering" servant of the Lord really begins.* In actual fact, that whole 53rd chapter in our Bible is conspicuous by its absence from the Synagogue's yearly *haphtarôt* prophetic chapter and all the mediaeval commentaries. In its place there is a statement in brackets to the effect that "Some things are missing from here!"³³

But what is the message of Isaiah's Messianic hope as it stands? The reader should be able to visualise it as one coherent image. We will attempt in what follows to see the elements of that picture:

"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" (11:1--4). "In that day the deaf will hear the words of the scroll, and out of gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind will see. Once more the humble will rejoice in the LORD; the needy will rejoice in the Holy One of Israel" (29:18--19). "Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations. He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice" (42:1--3). "I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness" (42:6--7).

Israel too is the Lord's servant:

"But now listen, O Jacob, my servant, Israel, whom I have chosen. This is what the LORD says -- he who made you, who formed you in the womb, and who will help you: Do not be afraid, O Jacob, my servant, Jeshurun [the name is taken from Deut. 32:15 and is used as an affectionate name for Israel, meaning 'upright', 'honest'] whom I have chosen. For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and

streams on the dry ground; I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants" (44:1--3).

f) *Although Isaiah speaks of the Messiah-figure almost as if he were both an individual and a nation, he centred the national deliverance on a person whom he called Cyrus:*

"I am the LORD... who says of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please; he will say of Jerusalem, "Let it be rebuilt," and of the temple, "Let its foundations be laid.'" This is what the LORD says to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of to subdue nations before him... I will strengthen you, though you have not acknowledged me... I will raise up Cyrus in my righteousness: I will make all his ways straight. He will rebuild my city and set my exiles free, but not for a price or reward... " (44:28--45:1, 5,13).

Isaiah speaks in his prophecy of events which took place almost 200 years later. The Greek historian Xenophon wrote of this ruler in two of his works. In one of them, which is called *Kyroupaideia* or "The Education of Cyrus" he says that this king was not stained by cruelty. He relates how it had been prophesied that he would be king and how he was to have been murdered as a child, but the shepherd who was given the job to do spared him. Cyrus ruled Persia from 559--530 BC and was remarkable for the fact that he saved Sumeria and Akkadia from destruction and protected the religious rights of various nations. Observing these principles of his he granted the Jews the right, by his proclamation in writing, to begin the rebuilding of the temple which lay in ruins.³⁴ Some critics are of the opinion that Cyrus' name was added at a later date to Isaiah, and others that precisely this Isaiah tradition coupled with the Jews' significant influence in Persia might possibly have caused the ruler to take this name to himself. In any case, Cyrus' character matches the picture given in Isaiah.

g) *Most remarkable in Isaiah is the glimpse he gives us of the Lord's suffering servant.* This is so central to the Christian interpretation of scripture that we will touch upon it again separately, as with the issue of the birth of the Messiah. This image is one of the group describing the Messiah's high-priestly office. Isaiah states:

"The Sovereign LORD has given me an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught. The Sovereign LORD has opened my ears, and I have not been rebellious; I have not drawn back. I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting. Because the Sovereign LORD helps me, I will not be disgraced... " (50:4--7). "Burst into songs of joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem, for the LORD has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem. The LORD will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God" (52:9). "See, my servant will act wisely; he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted. Just as there were many who were appalled at him -- his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness -- so will he sprinkle many nations" (52:13--15).

There follows the description of the Sufferer who "was pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities" (Chapter 53). These portraits are universal in their intention, and they speak clearly of the "redemption" and the "atonement" which will be effected by the Lord's Suffering Servant.

h) *Isaiah gives the Messianic hope a universal dimension and describes its eschatological nature.* One day the "Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him" (11:10). God will destroy "the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death for ever" (25:7--8). The anointed servant of the Lord will be made "a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles" (42:6). He is made "a light for the Gentiles, that he may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth" and he has been prepared as "a covenant for the people" (49:6--8). "Many nations will marvel at him" (52:15 NIV footnote). "Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn... To you the richness of the nations will

come... Surely the islands look to me" (60:3,5,9)."Raise a banner for the nations. The LORD has made a proclamation to the ends of the earth: Say to the Daughter of Zion, 'See, your Saviour comes!" (62:10--11). In the light of this universal vision, which was already in evidence in the "books of Moses" -- the Pentateuch -- Jesus' commandment to go to "all nations" seems quite natural.

Isaiah wishes to underline this aspect from the point of view of the Covenant. In the 24th chapter, which could be considered the strongest description of the judgement on the world in the Last Days, we are told how God will "ruin the face of the earth", and that the inhabitants of the earth will be "burned up", because the people have "violated the statutes and *broken the everlasting covenant*" (v.5). Chapter 55 says, however, that all those who are thirsty may come to the waters, and it gives the promise:

"Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live. *I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my unfailing kindnesses promised to David.*"

And it continues:

"Surely you will summon nations you know not, and nations that do not know you will hasten to you, because of the LORD your God, *the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you*" (55:5).

RaDaQ explains that "the '*unfailing kindnesses promised to David*' signify the Messiah, as the name '*David*' is used of him, and it is written that '*David my servant will be their prince for ever*' (Ezek. 37:25)... *he will be the teacher of the nations...*" and of the Messiah he says that, "*he will warn the people and rebuke them*".³⁵ The passage from Ezekiel continues: "I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an *everlasting covenant.*" Jeremiah too concurs with this mention of an "everlasting covenant" and states that it will be a "*new covenant*", based on the forgiveness of sin (Jer. 32:39--40 and 31:31--34).

As we have seen, the oldest Jewish sources refer to the Messiah at 62 different points in Isaiah, although a mere glance is in itself sufficient to convince us of the Messianic drift of the "Old Testament's Evangelist".

Jeremiah,

the last of the great prophets of the kingdom of Judah, began his ministry in the 13th year of King Josiah, 627 BC, and continued his proclamation until a little after the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC. He became the "prophet of the nations", and was called to "uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant" (1:10). In practice it meant a call to failure: he met with violence, imprisonment, he was thrown into a pit, branded a traitor, and in the end it would appear that he was stoned. Jeremiah, the son of a priest, was able to observe the progress of the reform of 622 instigated by his contemporary, the young king Josiah, which resulted from the finding, during the repair of the temple, of the "book of the law" from one of its tumbledown rooms, apparently a part of Deuteronomy (2 Kings 22 and 2 Chron. 34). A similar time of revival was experienced in Isaiah's time when King Hezekiah purified the land from idolatry (2 Kings 18). The temple, the law, and circumcision had however become a false security for the people (Jer. 7,8 and 9). Courageously Jeremiah stood "at the gate of the Lord's house" and rebuked the people for having made the place into a den of thieves. It was not enough to chant "the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord" or "we have the law" or "peace, peace", when both heart and tongue had become accustomed to deception. Jeremiah also struggled against false, unspiritual prophets (23:16--40). He who has the word of God must speak it faithfully:

"Is not my word like fire," declares the LORD, "and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?" (23:29).

It has been estimated that the terms used to indicate God's addressing man, "declares the LORD", "the word of the LORD came" and "thus says the LORD" appear in the Bible 3808 times -- some 500 times in the book of Jeremiah alone. The prophetic office generally began when God spoke, with mention often made of the very year or even month in which it commenced. The Bible is indeed a record of the very words of God to man.

Jeremiah chapter 23 says regarding listening to the words spoken by God:

"If they had stood in my council, they would have proclaimed my words to my people and would have turned them from their evil ways and from their evil deeds."

The word for "council" or "counsel", *sôd*, 'secret', underlines the fact that we meet with God "in secret". Jeremiah did not, however, feel the injury to his people as an outsider. He said that his heart was "broken" on account of the breaking of the people; he "secretly wept" because the "people of God will be taken into captivity" and he "writhed in pain". When he wished to keep silence it was as if there was a "burning fire" in his heart. In this way the Old Testament's "weeping prophet" displayed characteristics which some critics hold to have given additional impetus to the expectation of a suffering Messiah. The nearer the destruction of Jerusalem came, however, the more comforting became the prophet's voice, until the Messianic vision unfolds itself to its brightest splendour in chapters 30--34. It is these chapters which hold most of Jeremiah's Messiah prophecies.

We find an eschatological term associated with Jeremiah's prophecies too. The phrase "the days are coming" is found 16 times in the book whereas only five times elsewhere in the Bible:

" 'The days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch' " (23:5--6 and 33:15--17); " 'In that day,' declares the LORD... 'they will serve the LORD their God and David their king whom I will raise up for them' " (30:8--9); "In days to come you will understand this" (30:24).

The whole of chapter 31 speaks of this time after the Jews return to their homeland, twice making mention of Ephraim, God's "dear son", his "firstborn" and "the child in whom he delights", all of which phrases the Rabbis considered Messianic expressions. As we have seen, Ephraim is specifically associated with Jewish interpretation of the Suffering Deliverer. Verses 31--34 speak of a "new covenant" in which God will put his law "in their minds and write it on their hearts" and he will "forgive their wickedness", and 32:39--40 promises:

"I will give them singleness of heart and action, so that they will always fear me for their own good and the good of their children after them. I will make an everlasting covenant with them..."

The Aramaic Targum interprets the following verses of Jeremiah as Messianic: 23:5, which says that God will "raise up to David a righteous Branch"; 30:9: "they will serve the LORD their God and David their king" -- If I might make an aside at this point; once in our Hebrew school in Jerusalem a young student saw in this and in another corresponding verse the Hebrew word *la'avôd*, 'serve' in the sense of 'worship as to God', which is in fact the meaning the word most often has in the Old Testament; 30:21, according to which "their ruler will rise from among them"; even 33:13 is given a Messianic significance: "flocks will again pass under the hand of the one who counts them [ie. the shepherd]"; and immediately following, the name which refers to the righteous Branch of David and to Jerusalem, "*The LORD Our Righteousness*", is also a Messianic prophecy in the Targum. *We find also in the Talmud three discussions of the book of Jeremiah which deal with the coming of the Messiah.*³⁶

Jeremiah's most important contribution to the Messianic idea is in his prophecy of the righteous branch who will be called "The LORD our Righteousness". This name appears in the Talmud as a secret name for the Messiah, and supports the tendency of the early Christians to read the Old Testament "Lord" or "Yahve" and the Greek "Kyrios" as referring to Christ.³⁷ Thus the early church broadened its Messianic interpretation, adopting a principle which, it must be conceded, often corresponds to the similar views brought out by the Rabbinic literature.

Another point to note in Jeremiah is in the words "firstborn" and "dear son" used of Ephraim, the name which is associated with Jewish tradition's most shocking descriptions of the Suffering Messiah, as we saw when we looked, for example, at psalm 22. The Talmud contains a tradition regarding the history of this son of Joseph, according to which the "sons" of Ephraim attempted prematurely to invade Canaan and met their

deaths in the struggle.³⁸ Jeremiah's most important Messianic prophecy is, however, the description in chapter 31 of the promised new covenant.

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- [16.](#) See eg. Obadiah 1:15, Joel 1:15, 2:1-2, Zephaniah 1:14-15 or Habakkuk 3
 - [17.](#) Is. 24:17-19, 41:15-16 and Joel 2:30-31 and 3:13-16.
 - [18.](#) Zephaniah 3:12-16. Joel 2:23 and 3:21 and Obadiah 1:17-21.
 - [19.](#) Eg. the commentary on Habakkuk 1:12, 5:10, 7:4, 8:3,9:9-10 and 11:4-5.
 - [20.](#) *Yoma* 9b and 21b.
 - [21.](#) *Avoda Zara* 24a.
 - [22.](#) *Sanhedrin* 98a.
 - [23.](#) Rom. 1:17, Gal. 3:11, Heb. 10:38.
 - [24.](#) Comm. on Habakkuk, beg. of p7.
 - [25.](#) *Sanhedrin* 97.
 - [26.](#) *Makkôth* 24.
 - [27.](#) *Sanhedrin* 97a and 98b, *Sutta* 49b and the Midrash to Canticles, 8:10
 - [28.](#) *Nicah* 6:8, 7:7-9 and 18-19.
 - [29.](#) Is. 25:7-9, 26:19, 30:19-20 and 66:22-24.
 - [30.](#) The Targum reads the following referring to the Messiah: Is. 4:2, 9:5, 10:27, 11: 1, 11:6, 14:29, 16:1, 28:5, 42:1, 43:10, 52:13 and 60:1. With reference to Isaiah the Talmud comments on the Messianic idea in: *Shabbath* 89b, *Pesachim* 5a, 68a, *Rôsh hashanah* 11b, *Mo'ed Katan* 28b, *Yebamoth* 62a and 63b, *Ketuboth* 112b, *Sanhedrin* 38a, 91b, 93b, 94a, 97a, 97b, 98a, 99a and 110b. The Midrash and Yalqut are not included here. The observations of the Targum, the Aramaic paraphrase of the Bible, are generally very short. Eg. Is. 16:1 says: "Send lambs as tribute to the ruler of the land".

This refers to the fact that on the death of King Ahaz in 716 BC Moab no longer sent tribute lambs to the the king. The Targum refers to the fact that "tribute is to be brought to the Messiah". The idea that the lambs which rightly belong to Christ should be brought to him would serve well as a "Targum" or sermon theme for our day. The Talmud's train of thought is not readily grasped by the reader of today as it is mainly concerned with the exposition of the Jewish law. The Midrash also practices this kind of *ribuyim* amplification which does not often have points of contact with Christian thought.

- [31.](#) See Is. 10:20-22, 16:14 or 28:5 and Jer. 6:9, Ez. 6:8 and Zech. 8:12 or Deut. 28:62-64
- [32.](#) See Is. 11:1,10 and 53:2 or Jer. 23:6 and Zech. 3:8, 6:12 etc.
- [33.](#) See the corresponding section of *Yalqut Mechiri*.
- [34.](#) See eg. *Encyclopaedia Judaica* and Ezra chaps. 1-6.
- [35.](#) *Mikraôth Gedolôth*, corr. sect.
- [36.](#) *Berakoth* 12b, *Baba Bathra* 75b and *Sanhedrin* 98b.
- [37.](#) See eg. *Baba Bathra* 75b
- [38.](#) See *Sanhedrin* 92b.

THE PROPHETS WHO WERE ACTIVE DURING THE EXILE

Both of the prophets from the time of the captivity, *Ezekiel and Daniel*, belong to the visionary figures of the apocryphal literature. Jewish esoteric literature is particularly preoccupied with the phenomena surrounding Ezekiel's call. If Jeremiah could in a way be said to have been Jerusalem's Minister of the Interior, Ezekiel would be in the service of the Foreign Office, following from far off Babylon what was happening to the Holy City. As a "seer" he made his news known to his audience on the same day, even though there was of course no radio. It is worth comparing Ezekiel 24:1--2, 2 Kings 25:1 and Jeremiah 39:1 and 52:4. Ezekiel received his call and vision in his own house on the banks of the Kebar river in the year 593 BC and functioned as a prophet for 20 years.

Ezekiel's Messianic message

is largely found in chapters 33--39. The people once dispersed will once again gather together like "dry bones", and God will breath his spirit into them (chap.37). Ezekiel was the Old Testament's most "priestly" prophet; small wonder, then, that he devotes many chapters (40--48) to the description of the future temple

and its symbolic sacrificial rites. His prophecy also contains much that is of consolation to the thirsty soul (eg. chap.34).

Ezekiel describes the Messiah as a "shoot from the very top of a cedar", which the Lord will break off and plant in the soil of Israel (17:22--24). "Birds of every kind" will come and nest "in the shade of its branches" (comp. Matt. 13:32). Once again the message of this chapter proves to have its own historical background: the prophet is forced to give an "allegory" and a "parable". A great eagle, the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar (605--562), comes to "Lebanon", symbolising Jerusalem in the Jewish literature, and takes from it "the topmost shoot", in other words King Jehoiachin, who had reigned for only three months or so, and carries him off to "a city of traders". Some of the "seed of the land", King Zedekiah, is taken away and sprouts into a vine. It should have turned "towards the eagle" but it sends out its roots towards another great eagle, the Egyptian Pharaoh, even though Jeremiah has warned it about that. But "will he break the treaty and yet escape?" asks Ezekiel, and so Nebuchadnezzar carries off Zedekiah to Babylon and ultimately conquers Egypt too (582 BC). Still, God once more takes a "shoot", and a "tender sprig" from which a "splendid cedar" will grow on the mountains of Israel, in the branches of which all the peoples will build their nests. RaSHI and the Metsudat David, among others, see the "Messiah-King" in this figure and a prophecy which will be fulfilled in the "days of the Messiah".

Ezekiel speaks of the fact that in the age of the Messiah the people will have "one heart" (comp. Acts 4:32 and Jer.32:39):

"I will gather you from the nations... I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. They will be my people, and I will be their God (11:17--20).

Ezekiel uses the term *ben adam*, literally "child of man", in a way which brings to mind the corresponding Aramaic phrase *bar enash*, "son of man", in the book of Daniel (7:13), a phrase which Jesus often used of himself. In Ezekiel this naturally refers to the prophet himself. However, the same situation as he describes in, for example, 33:30--33 was repeated in Jesus' life:

"As for you, son of man, your countrymen are talking together about you by the walls and at the doors of the houses, saying to each other, 'Come and hear the message that has come from the LORD.' My people come to you, as they usually do, and sit before you to listen to your words, but they do not put them into practice. With their mouths they express devotion, but their hearts are greedy for unjust gain. Indeed, to them you are nothing more than one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice and plays an instrument well, for they hear your words but do not put them into practice. When all this comes true -- and it surely will -- then they will know that a prophet has been among them."

Ezekiel speaks of the Messiah as a "shepherd" (chap. 34 and 35):

"I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd. I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I the LORD have spoken. I will make a covenant of peace with them... (34:23--25)." "My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd... David my servant will be their prince for ever. I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant" (37:24--26).

Jesus' claim that he was the Good Shepherd is unintelligible unless the Rabbis' exposition of Ezekiel's shepherd prophecy is accepted. *RaDaQ* says regarding chapter 34 that "my shepherd David" is the Messiah, as does *RaSHI*. *The Metsudat David* says: "He is the Messiah-King, who is to come from the seed of David; he will tend them and will become their shepherd." *RaDaQ* states of the prophecy in chapter 37 that, " 'My shepherd David' means the Messiah-King. He is called David, because he is of David's seed" and "there is a reference here to the resurrection from the dead". When we looked at psalm 2 earlier we saw the words from the Zohar about the Good Shepherd: "You are the faithful shepherd, of you it is said, 'Kiss the son'..."

Ezekiel 36:25--27 also refers to chapter 11's "heart operation" which was mentioned earlier:

"I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And *I will put my Spirit in you...*"

Some problems are created by certain enigmatic aspects in Ezekiel. Chapter 47 relates in detail that one day water will come out "from under the threshold of the temple towards the east" and will rise until it is "deep enough to swim in", causing "a great number of trees" to grow on each of its banks. The Dead Sea, at that appointed time only about two kilometers from Jerusalem at its nearest point, will be full of "fish of many kinds -- like the fish of the Great Sea [the Mediterranean]". This, according to scientists, is possible at any time, if the so-called "East African Rift", which begins in far-off Tanzania and comes up through the Red Sea to the Dead Sea depression, were for some reason to split. I have myself seen detailed maps which show how the situation is being followed by seismographic and other methods. There are channels in the Red Sea basin in which the water temperature is as high as 50 °C because of the thinness of the earth's crust, and the shores of the Akaba bay, for example, are continually moving away from each other at a significant rate. Joel 3:18 and Zechariah 14:4--8 offer similar descriptions of mystical water-miracles in the Last Days. Geological research shows this all to be quite possible.

A further mystical aspect, which the Rabbis almost always associate with the Messianic crisis in the latter days, is concerned with the so-called War of Gog and Magog and the disarmament which is to follow it (chaps 38--39). There is almost a modern ring to these descriptions. First chapter 37 describes the people of Israel who have been raised almost like "dry bones" from their graves and taken back to their own land, then chapter 38 relates how the peoples of the north will "arm themselves" against them. This will take place "in days to come" (v. 16). But when they are attacked "there shall be a great earthquake in the land of Israel" and "the mountains will be overturned, the cliffs will crumble... and I will pour down torrents of rain, hailstones and burning sulphur" on the attackers. Chapter 39 tells us that when the war has come to an end "those who live in the towns of Israel will go out and use the weapons for fuel", which will supply them for seven years, and "men will be regularly employed to cleanse the land". "At the end of seven months [of burying the dead invaders] they will begin their search". The chapter concludes with the promise: "I will no longer hide my face from them, for I will pour out my Spirit on the house of Israel." There are frequent references in the Talmud and particularly in the later Midrash to these events of the Last Days as signs of the coming of the Messiah (cf. the question in Matt. 24:3).

There is also a *cryptic prophecy*, in the middle of the chapters which describe the future Temple (40--48), about the East Gate "which was shut". *These verses (at the beginning of chapter 44) hold great interest for the Jewish expositors, as they see in them a reference to the Messiah:*

"The LORD said to me, 'This gate is to remain shut. It must not be opened; no-one may enter through it. It is to remain shut because the LORD, the God of Israel, has entered through it. The prince himself is the only one who may sit inside the gateway to eat in the presence of the LORD.'" *RaDaQ, the Metsudat David, and the Biûr ha-Inyan understand the "prince" as signifying the Messiah-King.* In so doing they refer to the fourth verse which says that "the glory of the LORD filled the temple of the LORD". The Biûr ha-Inyan says of the closed gate that "The God of Israel has entered through it, and therefore it is closed". *This teaches that "the Holy Spirit will never leave from there. After he came and entered into the temple the gate was closed".* These verses are surely connected in some way with the words of Ezekiel 11:23, which say that "the glory of the LORD went up from within the city and stopped above the mountain east of it".

It may be that these mystical features are illustrative of a general expectation that the Messiah would come and occupy his temple. Perhaps Haggai 2:9 also speaks of this hope when it says that "the glory of the present house will be greater than the glory of the former". There is a current of thought in Islam concerning

this Eastern or Golden Gate, that when "Issa" -- Jesus -- returns the gate will be opened. Since, however, it has apparently been closed only from the year 1530 AD, Ezekiel could hardly have meant that. It must simply be conceded that even in Jewish Messianic expectation there are features for which no solution has been found. Still they should not be brushed aside in trying to give an account of Rabbinic thought. The Christian ought simply to remember that Jesus himself steered clear of political and other peripheral issues, concentrating in the first place on his office as Redeemer. Ezekiel's main contribution is related to what he says about the Messiah as the Good Shepherd and to his promise of the people's spiritual renewal.

Daniel

is The other great prophet of the exile. He was apparently taken into captivity along with Ezekiel in the deportation of 605 BC and was active from his early youth for 65 years up to at least the "first year of King Cyrus' reign", 537 BC. The neo-platonic philosopher Porphyros claimed at the turn of the 3rd and 4th centuries AD regarding the date of composition of the book of Daniel that it was not written until the time of the Maccabean rebellion ca. 160 BC. Nevertheless, Daniel's Hebrew is closely related to that of Ezekiel, and its Aramaic chapters (2:4b--7:28) are at the latest from the year 300 BC. *One of the Aramaic Qumran manuscripts, the "Genesis Apocryphon" (ca. 150--100 BC), differs markedly from the Aramaic of Daniel in its syntax, word-order, vocabulary and orthography, as Professor Gleason L. Archer and others have shown.* The complete absence of Greek loan-words, with the exceptions of the three musical instruments, which were most likely part of an international vocabulary, also points to a time before the empire of Alexander the Great (356--323 BC).³⁹ Josephus has left us an interesting anecdote in his History: It was said that Alexander had visited Jerusalem after his conquest of Egypt and that the High Priest in all his splendour had come out to receive him. When Alexander bowed down before the High Priest he was asked why he did so. He said in reply that he was actually bowing to God, of whom the High Priest was the representative, and that while still in Macedonia he had had a dream of this meeting. *Then the King "was shown from the book of Daniel the passage where it says that a certain Greek will come to destroy the whole Persian empire", and Alexander is said to have guessed that it referred to him.*⁴⁰

The question as to whether Moses or Isaiah, for example, are the actual authors of the books which go by their names is not of central importance. Isaiah himself was given the charge to "bind up the testimony" and to "seal up the law among his disciples" (8:16). The scribe Baruch worked as amanuensis to Jeremiah, and had to write all over again the scroll which King Jehoiakim had burned four columns at a time in the firepot of his winter apartments (chap. 36). What Baruch says of Jeremiah is, however, typical even of that time: "He dictated all these words to me, and I wrote them in ink on the scroll" (v 18). Both Elisha and Elijah too had their own disciple-prophets. There is nothing to stop us from thinking that all of Daniel's prophecies are actually from his mouth and that his "school" preserved them in writing at a very early stage.

What Daniel has to say about the Messiah culminates in his vision of the figure "like a Son of Man, coming with the clouds". *RaSHI* says quite straightforwardly of this that "He is the Messiah-King". *The Metsudat David* similarly understands that "this refers to the Messiah-King". Daniel 7:9 speaks in the plural of "thrones", understood by Rabbi .Aqiba in his day as intended for God and the Messiah, and then the picture continues from v.13:

"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 worshipped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.*"

Back in chapter 2 verse 44 we find a hint that, "The God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed" and it will "endure for ever". Jesus most often used of himself the phrase "Son of Man", as it

unites on the one hand his humanity and on the other hand his return at the end of the days. Furthermore, the authority for the command to preach the gospel "to all nations" is based on these verses.

Daniel's specific discussion of the Messiah centres around

a) *The words of 2:22:*

"He reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what lies in darkness, *and light dwells with him.*"

The Midrash Rabbah, regarding the Aramaic word *nehorâ*, 'light', in this verse says:

" 'Light dwells with him'; this is the Messiah-King, for it is written: 'Arise, shine, for your light has come' " (Is. 60:1).⁴¹

The Midrash on Lamentations also contains an interesting discussion connected with the destruction of the temple: "In the moment when the temple was destroyed the Messiah was born... but a storm carried him off." This thought is apparently a result of the fact that the Messiah should have come, according to Daniel 9, during the time of the second Temple. After this the Midrash speaks of the Messiah as "*The Comforter and Reviver of the soul*", "*the Lord Our Righteousness*", "*Hanina*" or "*the One called Mercy*", "*the Branch*" and "*Yinnon*", '*flourish*', etc., and "*Rabbi Srungaya [from near Tiberias] says: 'Nehirâ is his name, because it is written that In him is light' (nehorâ)*".⁴²

b) *The most far-ranging discussion related to the Messiah is found in the interpretation of the 'Son of Man' concept in chapter 7*, albeit fragmented throughout the vast Jewish literature. We saw earlier how this phrase is accepted as an epithet for the Messiah even in Jewish quarters. Rabbi Saadia Gaon (882--942 AD), considered one of the foremost teachers of his time, explains that "*He is the Messiah Our Righteousness; and is it not of the Messiah that it is written, 'he is humble and rides on a donkey'? He will come humbly, not proudly on horseback. Regarding the 'coming with the clouds', this concerns the host of the heavenly angels; and here is the greatness which the Creator will grant the Messiah.*"⁴³

c) *The third aspect of the Messianic discussion is centred around the words of chapter 9 which speak of the time of the Messiah's coming and how "sin will be put to an end," how the "Anointed One", the Messiah, will be put to death, and the "city and the sanctuary" will be destroyed. This has already been discussed earlier.*

d) *Daniel also speaks of the resurrection hope:*

"Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt... " (12:2--3).

e) *The book of Daniel has also given great impetus to the eschatological expectation of the Last Days, in which connection the Jews often speak of the Messiah.*

One kind of "common denominator" useful when dating Daniel is the phrase "the God of heaven", who will set up the kingdom, or the mention of the "King of heaven", to whom, for example, Nebuchadnezzar prayed when he had recovered from his mental illness (2:44 and 4:37).⁴⁴ This phrase was apparently current in Babylon at precisely the time spoken of in Daniel.⁴⁵ In the Far East there is much discussed of whether the oldest religion in China was a belief in the "God of heaven". In the famous National Palace museum in Taipei there is on display a Chinese model of a simple 8-stepped stone altar at which in its day the "God of heaven" was worshipped, and which nowadays is continually surrounded by a band of curious enquirers. This would form an interesting subject for some young researcher.

^{39.} Gleason L. Archer Jr., *Das Hebräische im Buch Daniel verglichen mit den Schriften der Sekte von Qumran*, Basel 1972, or K.A. Kitchen, *The Aramaic of Daniel*, Bibel und Gemeinde 1965, 4; 77, p414.

^{40.} See *Antiquities of Jews*, XI; 8,5.

41. *Bereshit Rabbah*, parasha 1.
 42. *Midrash Eicha Rabbah*, end of parasha 1. Note *Nehira/nehora*
 43. *Mikraoth Gedoloth* corr. sect. and *Sanhedrin* 98a. Comp. Mark 8:38 or Matt. 16:27
 44. See eg. 2 Chron 36:23, Ezra 1:2, Nehemiah 1:4,5 and 2:4 or Jonah 1:9 and the words of Abraham to his chief servant in Gen 24:3.
 45. Also of interest is the extensive study of C.H. Kang and Ethel R. Nelson, *The Discovery of Genesis ... in the Chinese Language*, Concordia House, St. Louis 1979, 139pp.

THE PROPHETS WHO APPEARED AFTER THE EXILE

The prophets Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi who were active after the Babylonian captivity focussed their Messianic hopes on the new Temple. The historical background to this time is described in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

Haggai

received his prophecy in the second year of King Darius in 520 BC and continued his proclamation for 4 months. He depicts the contradiction in which "the people say, 'The time has not yet come for the LORD's house to be built,' " whereas the LORD said, "Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your panelled houses?" Nevertheless, God "stirred up the spirits" of the governor Zerubbabel and the priest Joshua to the extent that they "came and began to work on the house of the LORD". And it was of this Temple the promise was given that, "The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house" (2:9). In this spirit Haggai was able to encourage his contemporaries:

"But now be strong, O Zerubbabel... Be strong, O Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest. Be strong, all you people of the land... 'This is what I covenanted with you... ' declares the LORD... 'And my Spirit remains among you. Do not fear.' This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth... ' " (2:4--6). " 'From this day on I will bless you'... I will make you like my signet ring, for I have chosen you,' declares the LORD Almighty" (2:19,23).

This general message is associated by the Rabbis with an expectation of "salvation" which is aimed at the time of the "end of the end" and the "last days". God will move heaven and earth and the hearts of the nations. *Commenting on the "signet ring" the Metsudat David says that, "Just as a signet ring is not removed from the owner's hand, so my love will not recede from him, for 'I have chosen you'. I have chosen one from your seed to be the Messiah-King"*. And indeed this Zerubbabel, who is mentioned in Jesus' genealogy, became the seal of the Messianic idea (see Matt. 1:12).

Zechariah

began his ministry two months after Haggai in 520 BC. The high priest Joshua and his friends were *living* prophecies, in that they had to take off their "filthy clothes" as a symbol of the way the LORD Almighty would "remove the sin of this land in a single day" (3:9). "The LORD will again comfort Zion (1:17). Of Israel the LORD said: "Whoever touches you touches the apple of his eye". One day the nation will celebrate a great "Feast of Tabernacles" and then even the bells of the horse and the cooking pots will be "HOLY TO THE LORD". Nevertheless, at this time the "day of small things" is not to be despised (2:8, chap. 14 and 4:10).

The Targum interprets the promise in Zech. 3:8, "I am going to bring my servant the Branch," as that God "will bring his servant the Messiah, who is to come". Speaking of the "capstone" of 4:7 the Targum says, "In this way the Messiah will be revealed, for his name is from the most ancient times and he rules all the

kingdoms". The words of 6:12, "Here is the man whose name is the Branch, and he will branch out from his place", are translated as: "*Behold the man! His name is the Messiah. He will come and will be great, and he will build the Temple of God.*" And also 10:4, "From Judah will come the cornerstone, from him the tent-peg", are interpreted by the Targum as: "*From Judah will come his king, from him his Messiah*". *The Metsudat David sees here the "king who is exalted by the people, and who is placed as the cornerstone in the building, the most polished... as it is written: 'The stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner.'*"

The *Talmud* too touches upon the Messianic idea in its discussion of Zechariah. When, for example, 1:20 speaks of the "four craftsmen" which were shown to the prophet, the *Talmud* says that here we can see the "Messiah Son of David, the Messiah Son of Joseph, Elijah, and the Angel of Righteousness".⁴⁶ The *Talmud* also touches upon the King of the Daughter of Zion who rides on a donkey. At one point reference is made to the well-known words of Rabbi Hillel, who said that *as early as the time of Hezekiah the Israelites rejoiced over the Messiah, but "they ate him", and the Talmud hopes fervently that God will forgive Hillel, because "Hezekiah lived in the time of the first Temple and Zechariah was speaking in his prophecy about the age of the second Temple"*.⁴⁷ Zechariah 12:10, "they will look on me, the one they have pierced" is interpreted by the *Talmud* as referring to "the Messiah, Son of Joseph", in other words Ephraim, of whom we have spoken at several points.⁴⁸

The *Midrash* contains an interesting discussion of the secret names of the Messiah. Zechariah 9:1 speaks of "the land of Hadrach". The *Midrash* to the Song of Songs mentions, regarding that name, that it refers to "the Messiah, who is had [sharp] and rach [tender] -- sharp in his dealings with the Gentile nations, but tender towards Israel, which means that this Hadrach, the Messiah-King, will "lead" [lehadrîch, from a similar root] the people of the whole world into repentance".⁴⁹

Christian exegesis finds a great deal of Messianic material in Zechariah. Christ is "my servant the Branch", and "he will branch out from his own place" (3:8, 6:12).⁵⁰ He is "gentle and riding on a donkey" (9:9). He was betrayed for "thirty pieces of silver", which were then thrown "into the house of the LORD" (11:12--13). He was pierced, and through his redemptive work we have "a fountain opened... to cleanse ... from sin and impurity" (12:10 and 13:1). "If someone asks him, 'what are these wounds on your body?' he shall answer, 'The wounds I was given at the house of my friends' " (13:6) In Hebrew the phrase is literally "the wounds between your hands or arms, *ben yadeichâ*, and so the Rabbis interpret this as being a beating "on the shoulders, between the arms". The next verse reads: "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who is close to me!" This word "close", *amiti*, means in Hebrew 'of equal standing' or 'peer'. *The Metsudat David* says of this shepherd that "he is of equal standing in the sense that he is the shepherd of his people, just as I am Israel's shepherd". Ibn Ezra refers in this context to "the death of the Messiah, son of Joseph". Jesus himself quoted these verses during the Last Supper when he spoke about how his disciples would all fall away on account of him: "For it is written: 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered' " (Matt. 26:31 and Mark 14:27). Zechariah displays an apocalyptic strain when we read in ch. 14 of the Christian hope that: "On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives... It will be a unique day... When evening comes there will be light. On that day living water will flow out from Jerusalem... " (14:4, 7--8). We must always bear in mind, however, that such apocalyptic, dream-like features should be interpreted in their wider context. Nevertheless, they too belong to OT Messianic expectation.

The book of Malachi

finally closes the circle of prophetic revelation. Here we are in the late echoes of the revival of Haggai and Zechariah, around the year 516 BC. Some 60 years later the work of Ezra and Nehemiah will begin. The prophecy starts with pointed words: "I have loved you," says the LORD. "But you ask, 'How have you loved us?' " The people were serving the LORD with deception; they brought "blind, crippled and diseased"

animals for sacrifice, and had forgotten to give tithes to the Lord. Worst of all was that they had *"violated the covenant with Levi"* and forgotten their call as a priestly nation. Many had divorced their wives: "Has not the LORD made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his... 'I hate divorce,' says the LORD God of Israel" (2:14--16).

It is into just this kind of situation that the Messiah is to come:

" 'See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the LORD you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come,' says the LORD Almighty."

The phrase "the LORD Almighty" (*Yahweh Tsebaoth*) is repeated 20 times in Malachi.

"But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites... " (3:1--3).

RaDaQ, Rabbi David Qimhi, "without whom there would be no correct exposition of the Bible," says of the "Lord" who will come to his temple that, *"He is the Messiah-King and the Angel of the Covenant"*. *The Metsudat David distinguishes between the Angel of the Lord and the Angel of the Covenant: "The Lord is the Messiah-King, for whom the eyes of everyone wait and long and wish to come, but by the 'Angel of the Covenant' is meant Elijah."* The final passage of Malachi agrees with this:

"See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers" (4:5--6).

In Micah 2:13 we have already come across this thought that *"one who breaks open the way" will come before the Messiah*. Again *RaDaQ* sees Elijah here, and in the "king" of the following verse 14 the Branch, the Son of David. *The Metsudat David* says that *"Elijah will come before the Deliverance to turn Israel's hearts to their fathers"*, and in the King of Micah 14 it sees *"the Messiah-King"*. The work of John the Baptist cannot be understood without these interpretations.

The Midrash makes its own contribution to the Messiah picture in Malachi. Mal. 4:1 says:

"Surely the day is coming: it will burn like a furnace". On this the Midrash says: "When He who is to come finally arrives the Holy One will reveal his fire from its vessel, burning up sin, as it is written: 'The day that is coming will set them on fire.'⁴⁶

Malachi 4:2 promises that one day "the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings". The Midrash speaks of the *"rising of the sun when the Messiah comes, as it is written: 'To you who revere my name will dawn the sun of righteousness and healing'"*.⁴⁷ One of Professor Joseph Klausner's pet ideas was that through the Messiah a kind of "golden age" would dawn upon humanity, an age in which mankind would find healing under his wings, to use Malachi's figure.⁴⁸

In this overview we have seen it to be true that *"all the prophets prophesied not but of the days of the Messiah"*. The Jewish Messianic idea can be seen to be based, particularly in its older aspects, on more extensive material than its Christian counterpart. Even if the expectation of a future Saviour does often arise from the historical situation of the time in which the prophets lived, it displays to a surprising extent, even among Jewish scholars, features which are supra-historical in nature.

^{46.} *Sukka* 52b and the *Yalqut for Exodus*

^{47.} *Sanhedrin* 99a.

^{48.} *Sukka* 52a.

^{49.} *Midrash for the Song of Songs*, 7th parasha.

^{50.} See also Jer. 23:6. Is. 11:1 and 53:2.

^{51.} *Midrash Bereshit*, par. 6.

- [52.](#) *Midrash Shemoth Rabbah* par. 31.
[53.](#) Klausner, *Messianic Idea*, eg. p8.
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THE BIRTH AND THE CHARACTER OF THE MESSIAH

We have looked in quite some detail at the roots of the Messianic idea in the Pentateuch and the Psalms, and the prophetic literature for its part has also shown us the main outline of the Messianic hope in the various stages of the history of Israel. Nevertheless, it is important from the Christian point of view to get into focus just what the Jews really thought about the Messiah's character, his birth, and furthermore, the possibility of his dying an atoning death.

Before the Second World War the renowned professor Ethelbert Stauffer of Erlangen University studied the Christology of the New Testament, attempting to elucidate it in the light of Rabbinic Judaism. After the war he published three extensive Jesus-studies, using his "x-ray method", setting a high value on John's gospel in particular as a source of Jesus' testimony to himself -- the Dead Sea Scrolls had, after all, restored it once again to its place of honour. This authority on the Near and Far East was nevertheless capable of saying that, "The Rabbinic tradition is mere polemics", and indeed that is the impression which remains if one's thoughts are filtered through the utterances of the Talmud. *However, I believe we have already proved, in the light of the older literature which has not been subjected to the same censorship as the Talmud, that we have received a somewhat more positive impression. The Targum and Midrash in particular present the Messianic office from a wider, more universal point of view.* The one-sidedness of the Israeli pioneer professor Josef Klausner was primarily in that, as an inheritor of the German cultural tradition, he saw no need to apply himself in any depth to the study of the Messianic portrait, in Midrash.

The old Jewish literature can be very perplexing as one might read hundreds of pages without finding a single thought touching on the hope of salvation. Fortunately, the potential Messianic interpretations can be found in the Targum from the corresponding Old Testament prophecies, and the *Yalqut* or 'portfolio' contains discussions of the relevant Talmudic references. Only the Midrash demands marathon reading. It is much easier to pick up the Messianic thread in the labyrinth of tradition when one is aware of these points of departure. Once, after the conquest of Old Jerusalem, I ventured, with two Finnish companions, into a cave which leads from under the floor of 'Solomon's mine' in the direction of the Mount of Olives and Jericho. We took fright, however, right at the beginning and turned back. An Arab guide, native to Jerusalem, told me he had spent almost an hour in that cave some weeks before, maintaining that to avoid getting lost in subsidiary passages it was advisable to trail out a thread onto the floor as one went forward, which would then show the way back. There was once a stone quarry in the great theatre-like vaults at the beginning of the cave, in which stones for the Temple were dressed. Thus "no hammer, chisel or any other tool" could be heard from this quarry. Nowadays the tunnel, into which I took my two friends, is closed by official order. However, it is now time for us to wind back our thread to its start and find out what we have learned.

The main theme running through the oldest strata of the Jewish literature concerns the origin and birth of the Messiah. We do, of course, already know from Micah 5:1 that "the origins" of the ruler who will be born in Bethlehem "are from old, from ancient times", and so it was that in the Middle Ages the interpretation was still given that he "was before the sun, moon and the course of the stars", and that "his contemporaries called him by the name 'El' ", which means 'God'. This also agrees with the name "the LORD Our Righteousness" in Jeremiah, and with Isaiah's various epithets applied to the Messiah. When the Rabbis seek to prove these ideas of theirs they use isolated verses from the Old Testament in support, something which modern theology considers to be by its very nature unscholarly.

We have seen that the "Messiah person" was involved right at the beginning in the creation account. When God said "Let there be light", he created the light of the Messiah. The Zohar tradition uses many words to describe *the Messiah as being already in the "garden of Eden", where he drew up a new law "in which there are no 'thou-shalt' or 'thou-shalt-not' commands, zechut ôhovâh*. The Messiah is the "seed of the woman", "the seed of Abraham", or just "*another seed from another place*". He is the "Mimra", through whom the world was created, and he is the "Word", without which "nothing was made". He will be born *de-Rûah qudshâh*, 'by the Holy Spirit'. The Rabbis speak of the same kind of "*mystery of the number three*", *razei de-Sheloshâh*, as do the Christians, even though these thoughts are but the "outer shell of an inner truth" and are like a "postulate" of practical reason. The Messiah is also the "*son of the Most High, the son of the Holy one, may his name be blessed*". "*He was begotten by God*." He sits at the right hand of God. *He is Israel's "advocate" before God. All prayers should be addressed to God in the name of "Jesus, the Prince of the Presence"*. All of this dovetails with the message of consolation, for God is not a God of revenge but the God of mercy. Furthermore, we have seen in Rabbinic exegesis a strong Messianic hope, which is related both to the Messiah and to a wide, general eschatological perspective. If we wind the thread back we will see yet more features related to these issues, features which Christian Old Testament exposition has been unable to recognise as contributory factors to the Messianic expectation.

It must be understood that this Messianic hope, which can be found in the Jewish sources approved as normative, has already been through a two fold internal censorship. There remains, nevertheless, adequate material to support the authenticity of the New Testament's own interpretation.

The New Testament speaks of "the mystery of Christ" and of "signs" from which the trustworthiness of Jesus' Messiahship can be deduced. This agrees with the intrinsic nature of the Messianic idea on the one hand and with the Rabbis' way of speaking on the other hand. The historico-critical method is unable to penetrate thinking of this kind, especially if it is not even interested in the Hebrew source texts. We saw at the outset that the basic aim of the *topika*, in disciplines which we would categorise as *idiographic*, is to map out the "leading viewpoints" into their respective places and to reveal each issue's *topos* or 'place' in man's consciousness. This, in practice, is an attempt to understand the way of thought of the period in question. From the point of view of our subject, then, we will try to make clear what grounds the New Testament had for interpreting the Christ in the way that it has done. This always presupposes the choice of an appropriate source material and a wide "topographic" mapping out.

We have already seen some of the "signs" from which the Rabbis drew their conclusions. Isaiah 7:14 in describing the birth of the Messiah says:

"Therefore the LORD himself will give you a SIGN: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanu EL."

The shepherds of Bethlehem heard these words:

"This will be a SIGN to you: You will find a child... "

The devout Simeon foretold of the Jesus child that he would be "a SIGN that will be spoken against". The Old Testament correspondingly speaks of a "stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall" (Is. 8:14), which according to even the Rabbis is the Messiah. Exodus 3:12 promises to the first Moses: "I will be with you. And this will be the SIGN to you", and in the same way the second Moses, the Messiah, uses the "I am" declaration, which is taken from God's own name. When Jesus says that he will be raised up just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, the Wisdom of Solomon agrees with this "SIGN of salvation". In referring to his resurrection Jesus said that no sign would be given to his generation "but the SIGN of Jonah", and again this analogy is found in the Midrash literature associated with the resurrection. Such signs make an appeal to the hearer's own powers of deduction. It is difficult to find any individual from the time of the second Temple who could come remotely near to fulfilling these "SIGNificant" features in the way that they find their fulfilment in Jesus.

The main characteristic, found throughout the traditional Jewish exegesis and equally in the New Testament, is the way in which the Bible is handled associatively. The best example of this might be in the Midrash's exposition of psalm 2 which connects the word bar, 'son', with several Messianic prophecies in Isaiah, with the Son of Man in Daniel, and with the Messiah who sits at the right hand of God in psalm 110.

We will look in some depth at the background to the virgin birth of Jesus in the NT volume of our ROOTS book. But we have already, however, seen clearly that the oldest uncensored Jewish source texts speak abundantly of the Messiah's supra-historical characteristics and even make cryptic references to his miraculous birth. The most remarkable of these is to be found in the Zohar tradition, to which a certain scholar of Jewish origin has referred. In Isaiah 9:6 we read: "For to us a child is born" and "of the INCREASE OF HIS GOVERNMENT and peace there will be no end". In copying the Scriptures the Hebrew scribes were unwilling to change any detail, even to correct obvious spelling mistakes, such as we find in the Hebrew of this verse, fearing that later copyists might make their own corrections and that the process could go on *ad infinitum*. Here, the 'm' in the middle of the word *le-Marbe*, 'of-the-increase', which was at some stage in the transmission of the text accidentally changed to a "closed" or "final" 'm', has been preserved uncorrected. The Midrash on Ruth, one of the oldest, asking why this 'm' is closed, comes to the conclusion that Hezekiah should have been the Messiah but the matter was "delayed". *The Zohar on the other hand decides that the closed 'm' refers to the fact that the Messiah will be born from a "closed womb"*. Perhaps such things were in Professor David Flusser's mind when, on a visit to Finland in the summer of 1984, he was asked for his views on the New Testament's most difficult questions. Of the resurrection of Jesus he stated categorically:

"It is a historical fact... I was not there at the tomb myself, of course, but the resurrected Jesus did manifest himself to his disciples. It cannot, it is true, be scientifically verified. It is ultimately a matter of faith"

And the Virgin Birth?

"Nor does that go against Jewish thinking."

Historical criticism approaches our subject by asking the basic meanings of the words in the original languages. The word *alma* used by Isaiah does unquestionably also mean 'a young woman'. Isaac's bride Rebecca was an *alma* (Gen. 24:43), but she was also a *betulâh*, "a virgin; no man had ever lain with her" (v.16). The word *na'ara*, is also used of her, even though this word appears in the Old Testament now and then together with the word for 'virgin', *na'ara betulâh*.⁵⁴ Abraham Even Shushan, the compiler of a five-volume Modern Hebrew dictionary and an analytical concordance of the Old Testament showing every word in every one of the forms in which it appears, explains that *alma* means primarily a young girl "before marriage".⁵⁵ It is no doubt with this in mind that 200 years before Christ the Septuagint translated Isaiah 7:14 with the Greek word *parthenos*, which means 'virgin'.

"Historical" criticism is forced to content itself with the witnesses of Matthew and Luke the Physician, which state baldly that Jesus was born of the Holy Spirit and of a virgin. The language and thought of both gospels is so Hebraic that a bridge to the mythological imagery of the Greeks can only with great difficulty be constructed. And again, the fact that John and Mark do not give a description of Jesus' birth is explained by the fact that both were written, according to the Jerusalem school, later than Matthew and Luke, and both would thus be well acquainted with the careful work of their predecessors. Mark, nevertheless, stresses at the very beginning of his gospel that Jesus is the "Son of God", and John, in the style of Paul, insists on the pre-existence of Christ, that he was "the firstborn of all creation" (Col. 1:15). The fifth chapter of 2nd Corinthians tells us that, "God was reconciling the world to himself through Christ". *If we do not accept Christ's supra-historical characteristics even the doctrine of the atonement will lose its foundation.*

The doctrine of the Virgin Birth has been opposed by the late John A.T. Robinson, former Bishop of Woolwich, and more recently by the Bishop of Durham, David Jenkins. Regarding these matters, however,

historical criticism can claim nothing with any certainty, whereas revelatory-historical study teaches how they can be understood.

The many cryptic names for the Messiah in the Jewish literature make a further contribution to our understanding of his origin and character, even if Mowinckel considers them "enigmatic and half humorous".⁵⁶ It will be of some help to see the majority of these epithets collected together: In Isaiah 9:5 we find a ready-made list, from which we learn that he will be called: "Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." The Targum elucidates this verse, saying: "His name has been from ancient times..." and, regarding the 'Everlasting Father' part, that "the Messiah has been for ever".

In various contexts we have set out the following names which are used to describe the Messiah: BEN PÂRETS and PORÊTS (Gen. 38:29 and Micah 2:13), SHILO (Gen. 49:10), SOREQA or 'noble vine' (Gen. 49:11 and John 15:1), MASHIA .H or 'anointed' (Ps. 2:2 and Daniel 9:26), THE ANGEL OF THE COVENANT (Mal. 3:1), THE SECOND MOSES (Deut. 18:18), THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS (Jer. 23:6, 33:16), PENUEL and PENIEL (Gen. 32:30), THE PRINCE OF THE PRESENCE and THE ANGEL OF THE PRESENCE (Is. 63:9), METATRON and MIMRA (Zohar), YINNON (Ps. 72:17), MORÂH 'the One to be feared' (Ps 76:12), THE FIRST (Is. 41:27), THE CORNERSTONE (Ps. 118:22), THE TOUCHSTONE (Is. 28:16), THE SON OF DAVID (Hosea 3:5), NEHORA or Light (Dan. 2:22), COMFORTER (Lam. 1:16, Is. 52:9), HADRACH or 'sharp and tender' (Zech. 9:1), HANINA or Mercy (Jer. 16:13), BAR NAPHLI, ANANI or BEN ANANIM (Amos 9:11), EPHRAIM or EPHRAIM SON OF JOSEPH and THE MESSIAH SON OF JOSEPH (Jer. 31:9). In addition the Rabbinic tradition associates BAR ENASH or 'Son of Man' with the Messiah (Dan. 7:13).⁵⁷

A similar contribution to the message of Messianic hope is made by the Old Testament's eight Hebrew words reminiscent of the 'Branch' idea: TSEMA .H, (Zech. 6:12, Is. 4:2, Jer. 23:6), NETSER, (Is. 11:1), HOTER (Is. 11:1), SHÔRESH (Is. 11:10 and 53:2), YINNON (Ps. 72:17) and TSAMERET or RÔSH YENIKOTÂV (Ezek. 17:4,22). In the NIV these are translated respectively as: 'Branch' (the first two), 'shoot', 'root', 'let it flourish', 'topmost shoot' and 'sprig from its topmost shoot'. The precise meaning of the expression rôsh yenikotâv in Ezekiel's prophecy is 'head of the sucklings', which says that the 'topmost shoot' more or less "sucks" in the tree's liquid. The same root appears in the form YONÊK, 'suckling', when Isaiah 53:2 says:

"He grew up before him like a TENDER SHOOT, and like a root out of dry ground."

A Rabbi once said that he saw here a cryptic hint of the Messiah's miraculous birth, in that he will be born, as it were, from ground "which has not been ploughed and in which no seed has been planted". Anyone who does not understand the figurative language behind these words cannot understand the nature of the Old Testament Messianic hope.

The historical and spiritual message of the 'branch' concept became more clear to me in Israel in the Winter of 1968 in a situation which had its own humorous side. I had said in the evening to a friend of mine, a Christian Jew, as we stood on the balcony of my house that there was a whiff of snow in the air. "Well," he said, using a Hebrew saying, "you're a prophet if it comes to pass". When I came back home at night from my duties I went again to the balcony, but the Jerusalem night no longer hinted at imminent snow. Nevertheless, at around five o'clock I was awakened by what sounded like a rifle shot, followed by a deep silence -- not even the usual noise of cars, dogs or cats (one morning we counted 13 cats in the olive tree in our garden!). Half in fun I reached over to see if my wife was still there; yes she was, so the Rapture had not just taken place! Then I remembered what I had said in the evening. Opening the blinds and I beheld with triumph a half-metre thick covering of damp snow on the balcony. My rude awakening had been caused by the tree in the neighbour's garden snapping in two under the weight of the snow.

Some days later an Arab gardener came with his new chainsaw, cut what was left of the tree down to about chest height and then made deep wounds in various parts of the trunk with what looked like a meat-cleaver. We stood and marvelled at this, wondering why it was that back in Finland we could not afford to leave such long stumps. What would we stand to lose? Hardly a month had gone by when my wife called me to the balcony to admire the sight from over the neighbour's wall: the cut and wounded trunk was full of shoots of new hope. From the wounds of the tree there was springing forth new life!

The Messianic hope is bound up with the history of the Jewish people. The tribe of Judah was taken into exile and the family tree of Jesse was cut off from its trunk. From the sole of the foot to the top of the head there was "no soundness -- only wounds and welts and open sores" (Is.1:6). However, a new shoot of hope began to grow out of the despair, and the stump of Jesse hid within itself the promise of life. One day even the "nations will rally to [the root of Jesse]", and the Messiah will be a "banner for the peoples" (Is. 11:10). God will preserve a remnant of Israel, "the meek and the humble, who trust in the name of the LORD" (Zeph. 3:12). In that day the "poorest of the poor will find pasture" and the "afflicted" of the people of the LORD will find refuge in Zion" (Is. 14:30--32). But the Messiah is also a comforter and restorer of the spirit (Lam. 1:16) on the level of the individual.

Using Gematria, the Rabbis saw a certain connection between the words TSEMAH, 'Branch' and MENAHEM, 'Comforter'. TSEMA .H = 90+40+8 = 138 and MENAHEM = 40+50+8+40 = 138. Seen also from this angle the Branch concept still implies a message of hope. On the other hand the word NETSER has additional Messiah epithets associated with it, as for example the Aramaic word NATRONA or NETIRUTA. Both the Hebrew and the Aramaic words are formed from the verb "to watch, guard" -- the name 'Nazareth' originally meant an 'observation point'. *The Messiah is thus a Guardian and a Protector.* Matthew 2:23 is thus rendered intelligible. We read there that Jesus' parents "went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: 'He will be called a Nazarene' ". This strange interpretation relates to the mention in Is. 11:1 of the Branch, NETSER, the root of which word, as we saw, yielding two Aramaic Messiah epithets.

We have seen that the birth and character of the Messiah are often described in the Rabbinic literature using supra-historical figures and terminology. The Messiah has been since before the creation and was himself involved in the act of creation. The Rabbis see enigmatic features in his secret names. The Messianic prophecies themselves are, on the whole, however, grounded in history. From the New Testament's point of view it is essential that the Christ be the Son of God. The Rabbinic tradition does not consider it impossible that the Messiah will fulfil this requirement both as regards his miraculous birth and his origins. The doctrine of the atonement likewise is founded upon the statement that "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself".

[54.](#) Judges 21:12 and 1 Kings 1:2

[55.](#) See the dictionary *Milôn Hadash* p1189.

[56.](#) S. Mowinckel, *He that Cometh*, p293.

[57.](#) See *San.* 98b.

THE SUFFERING MESSIAH IN THE PROPHETS

On first hearing it sounds a little strange that Paul should write to the Corinthians that he "resolved to know nothing" while he was with them "except Jesus Christ and him crucified". He said that he preached "Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles" (1 Cor. 2:2 and 1:23). The preaching of the Suffering Messiah is indeed a skandalon to the Jew because he understands what it concerns and it hurts his self esteem. To the Gentile, on the other hand, it is but nonsense as it is more difficult for him to grasp the

basis of the doctrine of the atonement. With his Rabbinic background Paul was especially qualified to be aware of the anticipation of a suffering Messiah which was associated with the prophets.

One question of principle always arises when commenting on the prophets and in particular when approaching psalm 22: *Do the OT descriptions of the Lord's Suffering Servant concern the nation of Israel or do they point to a specific person?* Josef Klausner has stated flatly that even though "we can find many prophecies from the prophetic age in which there are unquestionable references to the hoped-for deliverance, in all this there is not a single hint to a Messiah person". Of the first century Rabbis he says that, "they certainly believed in the possibility of a coming deliverance, but without any personal saviour". Even the concept of the "Son of Man" refers in his opinion only to the nation of Israel. If there is, then, among the earliest of the Rabbis "not even a hint of a suffering Messiah", as Klausner reckons, it is pointless to search for the roots of the Christian faith in this matter in Judaism.⁵⁸ Klausner's attitudes were however a result of his being a supporter of "prophetic Zionism," one who anticipated the foundation of a prosperous welfare state on the earth. On the other hand he had very little acquaintance with the points brought out by the Targum and Midrash, which always speak of a "Messiah-King" and not at all of some Messianic ideal, as we have already observed.

The Suffering Servant idea comes out most forcefully in Zechariah 12:9--14, 13:6--7 and Isaiah 53. Regarding the words of Zechariah that "they will look upon me whom they have pierced", RaSHI, RaDaQ and Ibn Ezra say that it refers to the Messiah Son of Joseph, Ephraim. The Talmud agrees with this interpretation.⁵⁹ Of the Suffering Servant's wounds "between the hands" Ibn Ezra says that they are to be associated with the Messiah Son of Joseph. We saw the same principle in operation in the exposition of psalm 22.

Christians see the portrait of the Suffering Servant above all in the 53rd chapter of Isaiah, which, as we have seen, was removed from the Synagogue's annual *haphhtarôth* chapter on the prophets and from the commentaries of the mediaeval Rabbis. It would appear that this chapter was still, however, discussed in Jesus' time, because Acts chapter 8 tells us of the court official of the Ethiopian Queen Candace who asks Philip who the prophet was speaking about, "himself or someone else?" The official was puzzled in particular about the words:

"He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth. In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth."

In this passage Luke is quoting from the Septuagint. We too will ask "Who is the prophet talking about?"

School text-books in Israel give the popular explanation that this passage speaks of the people of Israel, who have suffered on behalf of the other nations to atone for their sins. However, the prescriptions for the atoning sacrifices state that the offering is to be without blemish -- and I have never heard any Jew claim this for his nation. But what do we learn from the Rabbinic sources which are considered legitimate and representative? Do they support Klausner's thesis?

Isaiah 52:13--15 contains the most shocking paradox in the whole history of redemption:

"See, my servant will act wisely; he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted. Just as there were many who were appalled at him -- his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness -- so will he sprinkle many nations."

The Targum comments on this verse, saying that *"this is how my servant the Messiah will act wisely"*. On the other hand it interprets the following verses as meaning Israel. The Midrash Tan.huma from the ninth century and the later Yalqut Shimeoni say that *"this is the King, the Messiah, who will rise and be greatly exalted, higher than Abraham, greater than Moses, above the worshipping angels."* RaDaQ for his part

concludes that *"this chapter depicts Israel in its dispersion"*. Rabbi Elia de Vidas, who was active in Safed in Palestine in the 16th century, says: *"Thus the Messiah suffered on account of our sins, and was wounded; He who does not wish the Messiah to be wounded for our transgressions may choose himself to suffer and carry his own sins."*⁶⁰ The well-known Rabbi Moses Alshekh who was also active in Safed in the late 16th century wrote of Isaiah 53: *"Our ancient Sages have preserved for us the witness of tradition that this refers to the Messiah. For this reason we too, following them, should consider the subject of this prophecy to be David, the Messiah, who will appear in this way."*

The Talmud also touches upon Isaiah 53. The *Masechet Sanhedrin* ponders over when the Son of David is to come. He will come only in a generation which is either "totally righteous or totally sinful". If Israel is not righteous he "will come in poverty, riding on a donkey". And "Rabbi Yehoshûa Ben Levi saw Elijah at the mouth of the cave of Rabbi Shimeon Ben Jochai and said to him (to Elijah, who knows the Messianic secrets), *"Will I get into the world which is to come?" "If this Lord grants it," Elijah answered. Rabbi Yehoshûa Ben Levi said, "I see two and heard a third voice [the mystery of the number three]. When will the Messiah come?" he asked again. "Go and ask of him yourself!" Elijah answered. At that Rabbi Yehoshûa asked, "Where does he dwell?" "At the Roman Gate!" "And what is the sign by which he may be known?" "He will be sitting with the poor and the sick, and all those whom he frees he binds at the same time; he will free one and he will bind the other."*⁶¹

RaSHI says of this strange conversation that the "Roman gate" means the so-called *Paradise gate*. Could there be here a reflection of the fact that the Rabbis called *Sheol* (the Hades) "Paradise" and "Abraham's bosom". On the pages which follow the *Masechet Sanhedrin* carries on this discussion: First the question is posed as to what should a man do to escape from the "Messianic sufferings", and the answer is found to be "the reading of the Torah and mercy". After this comes a typical discussion of the names of the Messiah which concludes with the name HIVRÂH or "leper". *This reference to a "leper" comes from the word nagûa of Isaiah 53:4, which means 'afflicted with illness' -- there is even a special section in the Talmud, negaim, concerned with the identification and isolation of leprosy. The Aramaic word HIVRÂH originally meant 'white' and then later 'leper', as this terrifying disease at a certain stage in its development forms something like a white film on the skin. As the Messiah, HIVRÂH identifies with the fate of the sick person.*

We have already seen in connection with psalm 22 that *Midrash Ruth*, one of the earliest midrashim, discusses at length the "Messianic meal" which will one day be enjoyed in the "world which is to come". That description, which is based on Ruth 2:14, speaks both of "bread" and of "winevinegar" and they are repeatedly associated with the Messianic sufferings. The "piece of bread" offered by Boaz is the "bread of the kingdom", and *'the words 'dip it in the wine vinegar' are the same sufferings of which it is written: 'He was wounded for our transgressions' "*⁶² This description of the meal was apparently very important in its time, as the *Midrash on Leviticus*, again one of the earliest, also deals with it in the context of the Messianic idea.⁶³ *This very fact, that the Messianic expectation of the earliest Midrashim associates it with chapter 53 of Isaiah, witnesses to its Messianic character.*

*The Zohar tradition, which is one of the comparatively less censored Rabbinic sources, offers its own material on the Messianic interpretation of Isaiah 53. According to the Zohar the Messiah had a little hut in the Garden of Eden called the "bird's nest", and when he lifted up his eyes and saw that "the patriarchs entered into the Temple of God, which had been destroyed" and that "Rachel had tears on her cheeks", "then he raised his voice and wept so much that the Garden shook and all the Righteous who were there with him lamented and wept with him".*⁶⁴ The mention of Paradise may well here too refer to the realm of death. There is also a discussion in the oldest Midrashim of the fact that *at the same time as Israel was building the Temple, the Holy One commanded his angels to make "a booth in Paradise for the youth whose name is Metatron, so that he might transmit the souls of the Righteous to God in order to atone for the sins of Israel committed in their dispersal".*⁶⁵

The Zohar, which is not, it is true, pure tradition from the first Christian centuries, received a place of honour beside the Talmud in both Eastern and Western Judaism. It mirrors the inner movements of the heart of Judaism. One of the Zohar's thoughts on Isaiah 53 is the following:

"The departed souls will arrive and tell the Messiah [about their lives], and when they describe to him the sufferings which Israel is undergoing in his dispersion, that they are guilty because they do not wish to know their Lord, he will raise up his voice and weep on behalf of those who are guilty of this, as it is written: 'He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities.' And then those souls will rise and stand up in their posts. There is a castle in the Garden which is called the 'house of the sick'. In that day the Messiah will enter into that castle and will shout, 'May all the sickness and pains of Israel come upon me!' and they will come. If he did not relieve Israel's pains and take them upon himself, no-one would be able to suffer on behalf of Israel's oppression, of which it is written in the Torah: 'And it is written: In truth he did bear our sicknesses.'⁶⁶

As we can see, even the prophets are here treated as the "Torah", which in Hebrew literally means simply "teaching".

*The New Testament interprets Isaiah 53 as referring to Jesus.*⁶⁷ This is of course only possible if it was treated Messianically at the time of the writing of the New Testament.

The idea of the Atonement itself is grounded in Judaism. The book of Leviticus, which Luther considered the most evangelical in the Old Testament, speaks in its first five chapters of various sacrificial ordinances. The Hebrew words for these reveal what, at bottom, is in question. The first chapter deals with "burnt offerings", in Hebrew *olâh*. The root means 'raising'. The second chapter describes "grain offerings", *minhâh* -- the word *menuhâh*, 'rest', comes from the same root. The third chapter sets forth the "fellowship offering", *shelamim* -- related to the words for 'peace', *shalom*; 'payment', *shilum*; and 'perfection', *shalem*. The fourth chapter speaks of the "sin offering", in which the word for 'sin' is *het* -- it may be a development of the word for a "dividing wall": in Arabic the corresponding terms are nearer one another, *hatâya* and *hît*. Chapter 5 concentrates on the description of the "guilt offering". This word *asham* means literally 'guilt'. In addition, the Old Testament speaks of a "whole offering", *kalil* -- the word is a derivation of *kôl* or 'all'. The word 'sacrifice' in Hebrew, *lehakrîv*, means 'drawing nearer'.

The OT sacrificial occasions were great public festivals in which people gathered together with their families and tribes. They wished to 'draw near' to God and to each other: to be 'raised up', experience 'rest' and 'peace', to break down the 'dividing walls' between themselves and to be released from 'guilt'. The "guilt offering" involved the confession of their misdemeanours. Chapter 16 in particular, on the Great Day of Atonement, was, however, dedicated entirely to the "atonement" of sins. Aaron was to confess "all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites -- all their sins" -- and put them on the head of the scapegoat. It was decreed of that figurative "atoner" that it would "carry on itself all their sins to a solitary place" in the desert to die. The main thing was that: "Then, BEFORE THE LORD, you will be clean from all your sins." Luther loved this phrase "before the LORD", in Latin, CORAM DEO!

Atonement refers specifically to our guilt before God. 1 Samuel 2:25 asks, "If a man sins against another man, God may mediate for him; but if a man sins against the LORD, who will intercede for him?" Christ's atoning work answers this question of ours: "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself!" Jesus was the "Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!" "For God so loved the world!"

But what does the Jew of today think about atonement? The general understanding today is that after the destruction of the Temple prayer and fasting take the place of a specific atonement. Every morning the devout Jew prays from his Sidûr prayerbook: "Lord of the Universe, Thou hast commanded us to offer up the perpetual sacrifice in its time and Thou hast established priests and Levites in their posts and in their special status, and now the Temple has been broken up on account of our sins, the perpetual offering has

been postponed and we do not have a functioning priest or a Levite in his office... may Thy will, therefore, be... that the speech of our lips shall be considered our offering. The Talmud stresses the fact that "even the death of a righteous person can make atonement". The question is raised in a discussion, "How can Aaron's death have an effect upon the vestments of the priesthood?" This teaches that, just as the vestments of the priesthood have an atoning effect, even more will the death of the righteous make atonement."⁶⁸ Good works in themselves have also an atoning significance for the Jew.

However, specifically on the Great Day of Atonement the Jew feels that his sins must be forgiven before God. On that day even Isaiah 53 is sometimes mentioned: although it is missing from the annual reading from the prophets, it appears in a remarkable prayer which is read in the Synagogue. The separate prayerbook for the feast days, the *Mahzôr Rabbah*, contains a literary prayer by Rabbi Eleazar Ha-Qalir which may be from the ninth century AD, and according to some Israeli authorities possibly even from the sixth century.⁶⁹ The prayer begins poetically: *'At that time, before the creation, he already set up the oasis and the Yinnon' -- the word 'oasis' refers to the Temple, and 'Yinnon' to the Branch, the Messiah.*

The main body of the prayer reads: *'Then, before the creation, he already set up the Temple and the Messiah [the Rabbis' interpretation]... the Messiah our Righteousness has turned away from us, we are shaken, and can find no-one who can justify us. The yoke of our sins and our transgressions is a burden to us; and he was wounded for our transgressions, he suffered on his shoulders our iniquities; there is forgiveness for our sins. In his wounds we are healed; it is time to create for ever a new creation. Send him back from the circles, bring him back from Seir, so that we might hear him in Lebanon a second time through Yinnon. He is our God, our Father, our King, he is our Saviour and he will liberate and redeem us for a second time and let us hear of his grace a second time in everyone's sight, as it is said: 'I will save you at the end as at the beginning so that I will be your God.'*"⁷⁰

This prayer, which is couched in somewhat enigmatic language, says that the "Messiah Our Righteousness" has turned away from his people. Rabbi Saadia Gaon combines this Messiah-term with the Son of Man concept.⁷¹ Although the person praying is shaken, he recognises that the Messiah has already carried his burdens. Therefore forgiveness is to be found through the fulfilment of Isaiah 53. In this way a "new creation" is effected.⁷² The "circle" idea is set out by the prayerbook itself as meaning *'the circles of the earth'*. "Seir" is a secret name for Rome, the centre of Christianity, and in which, according to the Talmud, the Messiah sits "with the poor and the sick". "Lebanon" means the Temple, which "whitens" the people's sins by their sacrifices, as its root *laban* is the equivalent of "white". The one praying repeats that *God will save his people a "second time"*. Could it be that there is here Rabbi Saadia Gaon's idea that the Son of Man will return in his glory? Since we have mentioned the possible "second coming" of the Messiah we must here refer to the fact that in the Sidûr prayer book there is a prayer for both weekday mornings and Sabbath afternoons in which there is the request that, *'May it be Thy will... that we would deserve and live and see and inherit goodness and blessing ON THE TWO DAYS OF THE MESSIAH.'*⁷³

Isaiah 53 has still two more basic features which are characteristic of the whole chapter. *First, the figure of the suffering Messiah will startle his generation:* "What they were not told, they will see," "Who has believed our message?" -- in other words there is no question here of the familiar idea, found in the nations around ancient Israel, of a dying and rising God. So as not to see him "men hid their faces". He was "despised, and we esteemed him not". The Rabbis said that he was so appalling that no-one could bear to look at him. "By oppression and judgment he was taken away. And who can speak of his descendants?" Perhaps just this fact that he was "disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness" helps the suffering person who feels that he has lost even his value as a human being and his humanity. It is illustrative of this that mankind's most humbled people, lepers, have received help through this HIVRâH. The rich aristocratic youth Francis of Assisi, after his encounter with Christ, was one day riding home when he saw a leper at the side of the road. The love of God filled his heart and he dismounted,

went over to the man and embraced him. Soon he was to found special hospices for such sufferers, as did some nuns in his footsteps, all of which eventually lead to the victory over leprosy in Europe.

*The second basic feature is in the use of "he" and "we": "Surely he took up our infirmities." "He was pierced for our transgressions." "By his wounds we are healed." "The LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all." "For the transgression of my people he was stricken." The word for "he" in this last passage, *lâmô*, can, it is true, mean both singular and plural. Thus Ibn Ezra, for example, interprets the passage as, "For the transgression of my people they were stricken". If, however, we practise interpretation of this nature in order to avoid the thought of a Messiah-individual, we do indeed jump out of the frying pan, but only to find ourselves in the fire, for it would mean that the people of Israel receive punishment for their own sins. RaDaQ wishes to avoid this impression when he says that "every nation must think about the fact that they will be punished for their own sins." However, behind Jesus' sufferings we ought to see the words of Isaiah: "Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him" -- Jesus often repeated the Greek phrase that he "had to" suffer in order to atone for our sins.*

We mentioned at the beginning of this chapter the words of the famous Moses Alshekh that, *on the grounds of the "witness of tradition" it is right to see the Messiah in the Suffering Servant of the Lord. He added further that, "there are sufferings which are the result of sin and others which arise from love, when a righteous man suffers for the sins of his generation... and here the innocent righteous man, who has committed no sin, is forced to carry the sins of all the evildoers, so that they might rejoice but he will be filled with sorrow, they will be preserved in health but he will be crushed and stricken... and this testifies to the Messiah-King, who will suffer for the sins of the children of Israel, and his reward will be with him."*⁷⁴

We have seen that the Bible yields up a Messianic horn of plenty, as it were. The roots of the Christian faith are already to be found in the Old Testament. The Apostles' preaching arose from the conviction that "the scriptures are fulfilled" in Christ. In this way they constructed a bridge between the Old and New Testaments. In the Jewish understanding, Moses was the father of the prophets, and not only the 'law' was seen in the Torah but also the prophetic message. When Jesus spoke of himself in the light of the law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms, we can see that this point of departure was very natural. The classic phrase runs that the New Testament is 'concealed' in the Old, and we have been able to see this with regard to every fundamental tenet of the Christian faith. Even the Suffering Christ can be found throughout the Old Testament.

Since, as researchers have demonstrated, we generally think in pictures rather than in words, we have attempted throughout to 'lighten' our presentation by taking illustrative examples from real life. Isaiah 53 has been a turning point in the lives of many Jews. One of them is Rabbi Josef Rabinowitsch, the founder of the Kischinev "New Covenant Church of Israel" in Russia. Among other events in his life he took part in Moody's meetings at the World Exhibition in Chicago in 1893.⁷⁵

Rabinowitsch fled to Palestine from the pogroms of Russia in 1881, intending to found a colony there. He had received a New Testament from one of his relatives, as this book was "one of the best guides to the Holy Land". One day he climbed up the Mount of Olives and looked over the Kidron valley at Jerusalem on the other side, and a question came into his mind: "Why has the city of David been desolate all these centuries, and still is? Why have my people lived so long in their dispersal? Why do we go through these persecutions again and again?"

While reflecting on these things his gaze rested on the hill of Calvary. The words of the prophet Isaiah rose to his consciousness. He repeated by heart: "Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted." In the same instant it dawned on him that Jesus was the promised Messiah who suffered and died for the sins of his people. This realisation changed his whole life. On returning to Russia he preached everywhere that, "The keys to the Holy Land are

in the hands of our brother Jesus, and his words are rooted in our hearts, where they bring forth the fruits of righteousness".

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- [58.](#) Klausner, *Messianic Idea*, p8 and 258.
 - [59.](#) *Sukka* 52b.
 - [60.](#) See A. Lukyn Williams, *Cristian Evidences*, pp169-172, and Dalman, *Der leidende und der sterbende Messias*, pp35-39.
 - [61.](#) Sanhedrin 97b.
 - [62.](#) *Midrash Ruth Rabbah*, parasha 5.
 - [63.](#) *Vayikra Rabbah*, par. 34.
 - [64.](#) Zohar, Jerusalem 1970, the *Sullam* exposition, vol. IV, "on the Messiah's coming", p36.
 - [65.](#) *Midrash Bamidbar Rabbah*, par. 12.
 - [66.](#) Zohar, *Amsterdam Ed.*, Shemoth, p98. See also Deut. chap. 28.
 - [67.](#) Eg. Matt. 8:17, Luke 22:37, Acts 8:32 or 1 Pet. 2:22-25.
 - [68.](#) *Mo'ed Katan* 28a.
 - [69.](#) See Arthur W. Kac, *The Messianic Hope*, p83 or Aharon Mirsk who, in his book *Reshît ha-piut*, (Jerusalem 1968, p87), places him in the 6th cent. AD.
 - [70.](#) *Mahzôr Rabbah for the Great Day of Atonement*, Eshkol ed. p330. The form of the words is that of the Sephardic prayers.
 - [71.](#) Mikraoth Gedoloth on Daniel 7:13.
 - [72.](#) See eg. Gal. 6:16 and 2 Cor. 5:17.
 - [73.](#) Eg. *Sidûr ha-shalem*, Beit Rafael publication, T-A, pp105 and 273.
 - [74.](#) Alexander McCaul, *artic. publ. in Hebr. on Is. 53*, London 1899, p22. See also Is. 62:11.
 - [75.](#) W.R. Moody, *The Life of Dwight L. Moody*, p361.
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WHAT THEN SHALL WE SAY TO THIS?

In Jesus' time teachers had a custom of always asking their audience at the end in Aramaic: "Mai kô mashma lan?" which means "What does this mean for us?" Observing the same custom Paul too says at least five times in his letter to the Romans: "What then shall we say to this?"⁷⁶

Faced with every study we should ask ourselves if the presentation of the problem is reasonable and relevant:- does the treatment of the subject cover a sufficiently wide body of data? Is the way of handling this data such that it does justice to the way of thinking of the period under study? Can these things be applied to and possibly projected into the present day?

Sometimes we forget the Bible's intrinsic character and make demands of it which go beyond what it itself offers. First and foremost the Bible is a *library*, which contains literally a "numberless" amount of things. Hardly anyone could give unprepared an exhaustive lecture on any of the OT books; the New Testament is in this aspect more familiar to us. The Bible is also a *sanctuary*, whose beautiful stained glass windows can only be fully appreciated from the inside. The most important thing is to know the Lord of this sanctuary. The well-known French-Jewish etcher of Bible themes Marc Chagall once said to his engraver, "It is to be sung, it is to be cried -- that's the Bible!" To this we could add, "It is to be prayed, it is to be lived, it is the handbook of life!"

But it is also taught that the Bible is the "*inspired*" word of God. Some speak of verbal inspiration; some say that the Bible only *contains* the word of God. The doctrine of Inspiration sounds quite foreign to Jewish learned ears and it has caused much controversy in the West too. It would be better to use the words of the New Testament in 2 Tim. 3:16:

"Every scripture **INSPIRED BY GOD** is also useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (RSV margin).

The Greek uses the word *theopneustos* here, which means 'God-breathed'(NIV). And so Peter stresses in his letter:

"Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God AS THEY WERE CARRIED ALONG BY THE HOLY SPIRIT" (2 Pet. 1:20--21).

Here we have the keys to the doctrine of inspiration. Literalism, which cannot see past the letter of scripture, is a near spiritual relative of liberalism, which also fixes its attention on the letter in order to wipe them out of the Bible. Paul reminded his contemporaries, who had "an unhealthy interest in controversy", that "the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (2 Cor. 3:6). FOR US only the word of the Old and New Testaments is inspired, but we are thankful for all those source texts from around the time of Christ which illuminate the roots of our faith.

The Christian should never disparage any criticism which seeks honestly after truth, aware of its own limitations. Peter says that, "concerning this salvation, the PROPHETS... SEARCHED INTENTLY AND WITH THE GREATEST CARE", and that they "TRIED TO FIND OUT the time and circumstances to which the SPIRIT OF CHRIST in them was pointing... " This was REVEALED to the church "by those who have preached the gospel... by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things" (1 Pet. 1:10--12). The written word must not of course be set alongside the "inner voice", but in the idiographic disciplines, to which theology belongs, the topos of the message must always be found in man's consciousness. It is always essential for the practitioner of theology to be at one with his subject.

The Bible is also a *testament*. The Old Testament is not particularly "old", neither is the New particularly "new" -- both are given to us between the same covers. The inheritors may not change the form or meaning of the words in the will -- the attestors see to that. In the same spirit Paul says that we "must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught" (Tit. 1:9).

When we follow the situation in the Christian world we are forced to acknowledge that the waters of Bethesda have been "stirred up" once more. Theology often brings to mind the Israeli folk dance *hôrâ*, in which the participants actually take two steps backwards to every one forwards, and yet the impression given is that the whole circle of dancers is going round at quite a speed. Perhaps the swing of the pendulum is almost at its extremity and we will soon return to nearer the point of origin. Already at the beginning of the century, when the so-called "mythological" school which denied even Jesus' historicity was dominant in Germany, two well-known Jewish scholars, Leo Baeck and Gottlieb Klein, put forth the thesis that the crisis of Christendom resulted primarily from critics' ignorance of the Judaism of the time of Christ. Knowledge of the old Rabbinic literature is not the decisive factor since the New Testament as it stands is actually the most reliable source from the period of the second Temple. Many of the passages we have discussed could also be interpreted in another way, but if they are repeated a number of times in the old writings then they have their own value as witnesses.

One leading theologian has stated of the current Bible debate that he wants Biblical research to be even more critical than it is. "This also means," he says, "that criticism ought constantly to adopt a critical attitude just as much to its own presuppositions and methods and their reliability and limitations". It was for this very reason that we dealt with questions of methodology both at the outset and throughout the exposition, since the choice of an appropriate source material is also an essential part of methodology.

Everyone knows that a computer outputs only what has been "fed" into it, and even then only in accordance with the principles by which the operator has commanded it. Man is also limited in this way and bound by his fundamental attitudes. The problem of western Theology is that it has arisen from Greek philosophical thought and has proceeded on the basis of the terminology of the Greek New Testament, mirroring the message of the Christian faith in the light of Greek mythology, from which the tenor of the New Testament certainly differs. In the 1950's a doctoral thesis "Hebrew thought in comparison with Greek" by the Norwegian Thorleif Boman was published, which has since then even in Japanese gone through four editions, as well as being translated into a number of European languages.⁷¹ Boman stresses that "hearing",

"action", and "practical" aspects are typical of the Jew, whereas Greek thought moves more in "conceptual" or "abstract" ideological problems. In the words of Paul, "Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom." There is no specific verb "to be" in Hebrew in the same sense as in other languages. The Hebrew says "Me Tarzan, you Jane," when expressing "I am". Hebrew thought is not a question of a static condition but of action and dynamism, to which Hebrew grammar also testifies. Even if we cannot agree with every aspect of the way in which Boman characterises the essence of Hebrew thought, it must be remembered that the Jew has no need to prove and theorise about that which he feels existentially to be true. Theoretical Biblical criticism, in which a "code" is first determined by which the gospels, for example, are screened to see what may be approved of as the words of Jesus, may actually pull everything to pieces without finding the heart of the matter. In the Hebrew way of thinking we ought to "listen" to what is at issue and ask if it "works" in "practice". Christianity is "discipleship" and "life". It is bread and water. It is walking in the light. Jesus did, after all, say that if anyone does the will of his Father in heaven, he will know whether the teaching is from God or if he is speaking from himself. The word "disciple" appears 264 times in the New Testament. In this way doctrine and life are seen as one.

When we play back these witnesses from the Jewish interpretation of the Old Testament which we have set out we become convinced of at least this much, that the older Synagogue and the oldest, least censored source texts speak of the same type of Messianic hope as we find in the New Testament. From the scientific point of view we can only study whether the New Testament faithfully reflects the thought of its own time. If this is the case, then we can trust in it. Sometimes the critic tries to force his way into the theological temple, wreaking havoc as he goes. When, however, he becomes convinced himself of the genuineness of the NT a change takes place in him. This was the case with the Bishop of Woolwich John A.T. Robinson, for example, who wanted to be "honest to God". When he went on unprejudicedly with his research into the thought of the New Testament he concluded with approximately the same time scale for the re-dating of the gospels as the "Jerusalem school", of which we will speak in our NT section. The establishment of the early date of the writing of the gospels meant for him, according to the newspapers, that he had to withdraw his earlier negative claims, although he is generally remembered only for his *enfant terrible* phase, as it had more sensation value.

The main thing in our study has been to quote Rabbinic interpretations associated with the roots and foundations of our faith. There is in fact in Hebrew a saying which goes that, If we quote the Wise *be-Shem omrô* or 'in their name' we will pass on salvation to the world. Martin Buber in his day said to me in a discussion that his "only criterion is his ear", and we leave the reader himself to sound out whether the matters we have presented have a relevant connection to the message of the New Testament or not. It is thus for the reader to decide whether Klausner was right in denying the belief in a personal Messiah and maintaining that Isaiah 53 is to be studied only as a picture of the suffering of the nation of Israel.

When we play our presentation back we see the Messiah's supra-historical features in the light of the Old Testament and Rabbinic interpretation. Although Judaism endeavours officially to avoid all discussion of the Messiah question, these sources contain all the interpretations on which the New Testament bases its Christology. The Rabbinic Messiah interpretation in its oldest aspects is grounded on the creation account and the description of the Fall, and it promises that one day there will be a tiquon or 'restoration' in which humanity's sin handicap will be "corrected". The Messiah's origin, birth, character, office, heavenly position as God's intermediary, logos theology, his redemptive work and resurrection, when he will swallow up death are all reflected in these sources. We can even shed light on the Lord's Supper, which is seen as the "Messiah's meal", which will be enjoyed one day in eternity. And not even the Doctrine of the Trinity is a mere ecclesiastical invention.

Many things appear in Jewish Messianic expectation in pairs. This fits in well with the spirit of the Bible, since Joseph had two dreams and God gave his people two tables of the law. Firstly we find a parallel between the Messiah person and the Israeli nation in its Messianic call. We saw in the prayerbook a mention

of the "two days of the Messiah". The Rabbis align with one another the Messiah Son of David and the Messiah Son of Joseph, Ephraim, with whom the Old Testament picture of the Lord's suffering servant is often associated. The Dead Sea Scrolls make a distinction between "the Messiah of Aaron and Israel"⁷⁸. The Rabbis, particularly in connection with Zechariah 3:8 and 4:14, distinguish between the Messiah's priestly and kingly offices. Moses and Aaron also represented this distinction, although Moses was primarily the founder of the image of prophetic Messianism. The first and the second Moses, the first and the last Saviour again underline this duality. In the same way Elijah and the Messiah often appear together. Generally speaking, however, Jewish Messianic expectation is by its very nature "political, national, and worldly".⁷⁹ Jesus' words to Pilate, that his kingdom "is not of this world", represent a different stance. Jesus gives himself consistently to his redemptive work after fighting out his Messianic crisis with the Tempter at the beginning of his public ministry.

Many Messianic prophecies could hardly have contained a Messianic motif in their early stages. Often a *historical theme* for the Messianic pericopes can be found in the prophetic books, a theme to which the Messianic hope has through time become anchored. In this sense "the prophets... searched intently and with the greatest care trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing". *It is a mistake for us to set our own conditions for the Bible's Messianic expectation and to narrow down the different aspects of the Messianic hope.* Jesus himself avoided vain speculation about his own kingship and the time of his second coming. In actual fact the study of the Bible's *Messianic typology and concept world* as such teaches us how to understand New Testament thought. And the fact that we may find from the Targum and Midrash literature interpretations from a very early stage supporting the New Testament's understanding helps us to listen more trustingly to the message of the gospels.

It may be that some readers are confused by our approaching the ROOTS of our Christian faith from the Hebrew thought world. The reason is that I have had to tailor-make both the Old and New Testament sections of this same study for a Hebrew reading public. This version before you has been through a certain amount of editing without which it would have been difficult to get the message over to non-Hebrew readers. I understand that I have led the reader onto strange soil and possibly even cast him far back in time. This is the "Nahson's leap" we will in any case have to make every time if we seriously wish to familiarise ourselves with the grounds of our belief. The author cannot demand that his point of view be accepted, but he would be very happy if he were at least given a fair hearing. We are perhaps on the threshold of a completely new period in Theology, once we begin to acknowledge, at an ever deepening level, the content of the inheritance we have in the Bible, and that from the Bible's own soil.

The well-known Jewish writer and theologian Shalom Ben-Chorin stated not long ago that, *"The time has already come to discuss the Jewish-Christian issue publicly and to handle it objectively and in the spirit of tolerance and democracy"*.⁸⁰ It is particularly Messianic Jews, these friends of ours who believe in Jesus, who find the return to their roots important. We "gentile Christians," however, also have reason to beware that we do not forget the actual cradle of our faith.

When the Lutheran World Federation held a 'consultation' in Bossey in August 1982 on "The Significance of Judaism for the Life and Mission of the Church", in which there was a strong Jewish contingent, the main theme was *"Christians' relationship to their Jewish inheritance"*. The consultation felt that, *"All have been impoverished by an understanding of the Bible that minimizes our Jewish roots"*. And *"In the encounter with Judaism and the Jewish people the church gains a fuller understanding of its own biblical roots"*. Such a discovery could bring about *"a new lease of faith"* in every area of church life.⁸¹

This miracle I wish for these ROOTS books.

[76.](#) Rom. 4:1, 6:1, 7:7, 9:14 and 30.

[77.](#) Thorlief Boman, *Das Hebräische Denken in Vergleich mit dem griechischen*, Göttingen 1968, p5. See also his study, *Europas kultur - og den jødiske arv*, Oslo 1972.

[78.](#) See eg. Josef Heinemann, *The Messiah of Ephraim and the Premature Exodus of Ephraim*, Tarbiz 40, 1970-71 and the studies of the Qumran literature in our Bibliography.

[79.](#) J.B. Frey, *Le Conflit entre le Méssianisme de Jésus et le Méssianisme des Juifs de son temps*, Biblica 1933, pp133-149 and 269-293.

[80.](#) Shalom Ben-Chorin, ISRAEL NACHRICHTEN 15.7.77, *Judenchristen in Israel, ein ungelöstes Problem*.

[81.](#) LWB-STUDIEN, *Die Bedeutung des Judentums für Leben und Mission der Kirche*, Bericht April 1983.

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